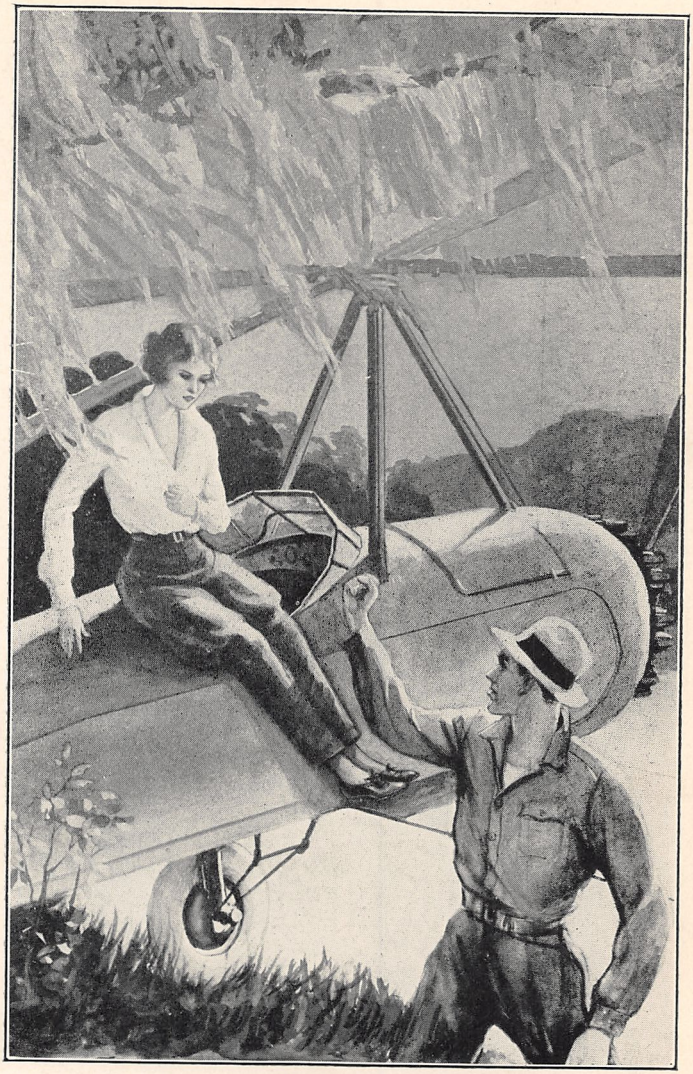
LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

EDITH LAVELL

LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

LAVELL

A. L. BURT COMPANY



He looked as if he meant to hit her, and Linda recoiled in terror.

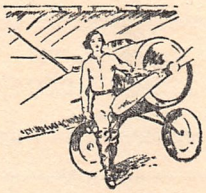
(Page 50) *(Linda Carlton's Island Adventure)*

LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

By EDITH LAVELL

Author of

"The Girl Scout Series," "Linda Carlton's Ocean Flight," "Linda Carlton, Air Pilot," Etc.



A. L. BURT COMPANY
PUBLISHERS
New York Chicago
Printed in U. S. A.

Linda Carlton Series

Thrilling Adventure Stories of a Group of Girl Aviation Enthusiasts

By EDITH LAVELL

LINDA CARTLON, AIR PILOT
LINDA CARLTON'S OCEAN FLIGHT
LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

Copyright, 1931
By A. L. BURT COMPANY

LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

TO

MY HUSBAND

VICTOR LAMASURE LAVELL

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The "Ladybug"	7
II.	The Aviation Job	25
III.	Kidnaped	40
IV.	Captive	56
V.	Escape	71
VI.	The Enemy in the Autogiro	85
VII.	The Smash-Up	96
VIII.	The Chief of Police	107
IX.	Two Prisoners	123
X.	Susie Disappears	138
XI.	The Island in the Ocean	158
XII.	The Money-Bags	172
XIII.	The Broken Motor-Boat	182
XIV.	Searching Parties	194
XV.	The Empty Island	209
XVI.	Searching the Ocean	224
XVII.	On to Cuba	237
XVIII.	Luck for Ted and Louise	251
XIX.	The Return	263
XX.	Conclusion	275

LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

CHAPTER I

The "Ladybug"

"THERE'S a young lady here to see you, Linda," announced Miss Emily Carlton, coming into her niece's room the morning after the latter's return from the St. Louis Ground School. The girl had just graduated, winning both commercial and transport licenses, and, besides that, she was registered as the only feminine air-plane mechanic in the country.

"Who is she, Auntie?" inquired Linda, rubbing her eyes and peering out the window into the lovely June sunshine. What a wonderful day! Too beautiful to spend on the ground! But she sighed as she recalled that at the moment she did not possess a plane.

"A reporter, I believe," replied the older woman. "Miss Hawkins, from the 'News'."

"But I haven't done anything to get into the newspapers," objected Linda.

"My dear child, you don't have to! Aren't you the only girl who ever flew the Atlantic alone? That's enough to keep you in the spot-light forever."

"But I don't like spot-lights," Linda insisted, starting to dress. "Couldn't you get rid of her, Auntie?"

Miss Carlton shook her head.

"I tried to, dear. But she wouldn't go. She wants to know your summer plans. I told her you'd probably just spend a quiet vacation with me at Green Falls, where we were last year. But she didn't believe me. She said you weren't the type to take your vacations quietly."

Linda laughed.

"I guess she's right, Aunt Emily."

The latter looked troubled. She had been trying for a year—ever since Linda's father had given her an Arrow Pursuit bi-plane for graduation—to keep the girl out of the air as much as possible, but she had not succeeded. The Carltons were comfortably well-off, and it was Miss Carlton's wish that Linda go in for society, and make a good marriage. But though

Linda enjoyed occasional parties as much as any normal young person, she had a serious purpose in life, to make flying her career just as a young man would.

"You won't go to Green Falls—with all the rest of the crowd?" asked Miss Carlton, anxiously.

"I can't, Aunt Emily. I—I—can't spare the time. I am trying to get a job."

"A job? But you don't need money. Your father's business is dong nicely——"

"Oh, it isn't the money I want," interrupted the girl. "It's the experience."

Linda finished dressing and came down stairs to meet the young woman who was waiting for her. The latter insisted that she eat her breakfast while they talked.

"Honestly, I haven't done a thing interesting to the world since my ocean flight!" Linda said. "Except win my licenses, and all the graduates' names have already been listed in the papers."

The reporter smiled at her as if she were a child.

"My dear girl," she explained, "you are front-page news now, no matter what you do.

You are Queen of the Air, and will be until some other woman does something more daring than your flight to Paris alone. So everything you do interests the public. Naturally they want to know what you are planning for the summer. Flying to South America, or Alaska? And what kind of plane do you intend to buy next, since you sold your Bellanca in Paris?"

Linda yawned, and fingered her mail—a great pile of letters beside her plate. Invitations, mostly from the younger set in Spring City, for she was very popular.

"I'm afraid I don't know yet," she replied, simply.

"Maybe if you read your mail—" suggested the reporter.

"She is to be a bridesmaid at Miss Katherine Clavering's wedding next week," supplied Miss Carlton, entering the dining-room. As usual, social events were all-important to her, especially affairs with the Claverings, the richest people in Spring City. Katherine, or "Kitty," as her friends all called her, was to be married to Lt. Hulbert of the U. S. Flying Corps, and her brother Ralph made no secret of his devo-

tion for Linda. If he had had his way, they would have been married last Christmas, and aviation jobs would be out of the question for Linda Carlton at the present time.

The girl searched through her mail rapidly, and picked out a letter which interested her above all others. It was from the Pitcairn Autogiro Company in the East.

As she read it, her blue eyes lighted up with enthusiasm, and she examined the enclosed circular with excited interest, completely forgetting her visitor.

The reporter waited patiently for a minute or two.

"Well, what's it all about, Miss Carlton?" she finally inquired.

Linda looked up at her as if she were startled, and suddenly remembered her caller. She handed her the circular.

"I am going to buy an autogiro," she announced, with decision.

"A what?" demanded her aunt, thinking Linda referred to some kind of automobile. "A new car?"

The reporter smiled.

"A flying bug?" she demanded.

Miss Carlton gasped in horror. A bug! What would her niece be up to next?

"Linda!" she exclaimed.

"It's a plane, Aunt Emily," the girl explained. "You ought to like it. It's the very safest kind there is. In the eight or nine years since it was invented, nobody has been killed with one."

Miss Carlton looked doubtful.

"No air-plane is safe," she remarked.

"This isn't an air-plane. It's an autogiro."

"But it flies?"

"Of course."

Linda showed her the picture. It was indeed a queer looking object, with its wind-mill-like arrangement on top, and its absence of big wings. As the reporter had observed, its appearance was very like a huge bug.

"They do say it's unusually safe," corroborated the latter. "You'll have to take a ride in it, Miss Carlton."

"Not I!" protested the older woman. "Firm earth is good enough for me. . . . No, it looks dangerous enough to me."

Linda smiled; she could never convince her

aunt of the joy of flying, or of the minimum risk, if one were a careful pilot. She was glad that her father was more broad-minded; if he weren't, she would still be on the ground.

"And where will you go with your Flying Bug, Miss Carlton?" asked the reporter, tapping her pencil on her note-book.

"Not on any long flight," replied the girl, to her aunt's relief. "My aim is to get some sort of aviation job."

"What would you like to do?"

"Anything connected with planes. I prefer flying, but I'd be satisfied at the beginning with ground work. . . . If you will write down your telephone number, Miss Hawkins, I will call you up when I have decided definitely just what my plans will be."

"Thank you very much!" exclaimed the other girl, rising. "I think you are a peach, Miss Carlton. Some celebrities are so mean to us reporters."

"I'm afraid I'm not a real celebrity," laughed Linda. "I'll be forgotten by the public this time next year. I sincerely hope that more and more girls and women will be doing things in avia-

tion, so that my little stunt will seem trivial. That is progress, you know."

Scarcely had the visitor gone before Miss Carlton was begging Linda to open her other letters.

"The Junior League picnic is tomorrow," she said. "And Dot Crowley is giving a luncheon in honor of Kitty Clavering. . . . There are probably a lot more things, too. . . ."

Rather listlessly Linda opened her letters. It was not the same, she thought, without Louise to share everything. Louise Haydock—Louise Mackay now—had been her chum all through school, where they were so inseparable that they were always referred to by their friends as the "double Ls." The other girl's marriage had meant a sharp break to Linda, for the Mackays had moved to Wichita, Kansas, where Ted was employed as a flyer.

As if Miss Carlton understood her niece's thoughts, she remarked that Louise was coming for Kitty's wedding.

Linda's eyes shone with joy.

"Flying?" she inquired, as a matter of course.

"Yes. She and Ted are arriving some time to-

night. Mrs. Haydock called up, and asked me to tell you."

Linda could not read her mail for a few minutes, so intense was her happiness at this splendid news.

"Ted can go with me to see about the autogiro!" she exclaimed. "I do so want his opinion!"

"Go where?"

"To Philadelphia, where the Pitcairn Company is located."

Again Miss Carlton looked annoyed, almost shocked.

"You don't mean to say you'll take time to fly to Philadelphia, with all your engagements?"

Linda nodded.

"I'll be here for the wedding, Aunt Emily. Don't worry about that. But nothing else is particularly important."

Miss Carlton groaned. What could you do with a girl like Linda? You might as well have a boy!

The mail was finally opened and sorted, and Linda dutifully went to a dinner dance at the Country Club that evening with Ralph Clavering. But she was tense all evening, for she was

hoping every moment that Louise would arrive.

About midnight the young couple dashed in, radiant in their happiness. To everyone's amusement Louise flew into Linda's arms in the middle of the dance floor.

"How do you get that way?" demanded Ralph, pretending to be angry. "As if it isn't enough to endure every fellow in the room tapping me when I'm dancing with Linda, without having girls do it too!"

But the double Ls scarcely heard him. They were so enraptured at seeing each other again.

"I'm going to stay a week!" announced Louise. "Luckily, Ted has some business in Philadelphia and New York, and he'll be flying back and forth."

"Philadelphia!" exclaimed Linda. "Isn't that great! Can we go with him there?"

"Of course we can, if you don't mind a squeeze. The plane isn't very big," explained Louise. "But then, we're not fat. Ted'll be tickled to death to have company—he hates flying alone. But why do you want to go to Philadelphia, Linda?"

"To buy an autogiro!"

"You always were crazy about those things.

Remember the time you gave up a dance to fly one?"

"I certainly do. And you wouldn't go with me."

"Well, there was a reason," laughed Louise, making no secret of her admiration for her husband. . . . "I think Ted'll go day after tomorrow," she continued. "We thought we'd enjoy resting a day, and taking in the Junior League picnic."

"Fine!" agreed Linda. "That will give everybody a chance to see you. Besides, Aunt Emily would die if I missed that affair. Remember the one last year. Didn't we have fun?"

"We certainly did," smiled Louise, reminiscently. "But it seems like more than a year ago—so much has happened."

"I wasn't even flying then," observed the other.

"And I hadn't met Ted!"

"You're a real bride, Lou!" returned Linda, affectionately. "But you're just the same old dear!"

The following day was just as delightful as it had been the previous year, and the picnic another success. To Linda it was all the more

enjoyable, because of the novelty of seeing her old friends again after the separation caused by a year at the school in St. Louis.

Ted went along with Louise, and entered into all the sports, just as if he had been born and brought up with the crowd in Spring City. Moreover, he was delighted at the prospect of having the two girls go with him the next day, and appeared almost as enthusiastic about the autogiro as Linda herself.

The weather continued perfect, and the three happy young people took off from Spring City the following morning. An excellent mechanic himself, Ted always kept his plane in tip-top condition, and it was a rare thing indeed for him even to encounter a minor accident. This flight proved no exception; straight and swift through the June skies he flew to the field outside the city of Philadelphia where the autogiros were on display.

"You really expect to buy one today, Linda?" asked Louise, as she climbed out of the plane.

"Yes—if Ted gives his approval," replied the capable aviatrix. She had always had the greatest confidence in this young red-haired pilot, who had taken her on her first flight, and

who had saved her and his wife from disaster upon two occasions.

"Are you sure that it can go fast enough to suit you, Linda?" asked Ted.

"It can travel a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour, and that ought to satisfy me. If I were entering any air-races, I'd want a special racing plane anyhow, for the occasion. But I'm not going out for races. I want to take a job, and I think an autogiro will be the most convenient plane I can have, to take with me anywhere I want to go. I shan't have to depend on big fields for landing."

"Right-o," agreed the young man.

They walked across the field and were shown a model by an enthusiastic salesman. As the reporter had said, it did look like a flying bug, with its odd wind-mill-like rotor on top, and its small stub-like wings, which were there mainly to mount the lateral controls or ailerons.

"It isn't so pretty as the Arrow," remarked Louise.

"Handsome is as handsome does," returned Linda. "If we'd had an autogiro that time in Canada, when our gas leaked out, a forced landing wouldn't have been disastrous."

"Why?"

"Because the rotor takes care of that, after the engine is dead," explained Linda. "An autogiro can come down vertically at a slower rate than we did with our parachutes."

"I'll never forget how scared I was that time we jumped off," remarked her companion. "You know, it's one thing to see other people do it—in the air, or at the movies—and its something else to step off into space yourself. That all-gone feeling!"

"I don't mind it any more now—it doesn't seem any worse than dropping ten stories in an elevator. But I know what you mean."

"Well, I have never had to jump since," Louise informed her. "But," she continued as they walked around the autogiro, "isn't there really any danger of crashing?"

"You can crash, of course," laughed Linda. "If you steer straight for another plane, or a tree. But tail-spins are practically impossible; they say no matter what happens the autogiro settles to the ground like a tired hen. It's the principle of centrifugal force—it can't fail."

"Oh, yeah?" remarked Louise, hiding a yawn.

"What I want your opinion on, Ted," added Linda, turning to the young man, "is the engine. You know more about engines than I do."

"I'm not so sure of that last," he replied, modestly. "Looks O.K. to me—I've been examining it while you girls chattered."

The salesman, who had been listening to the conversation, suddenly burst into a smile. He had been wondering where he had seen that girl before. Now he knew! Her pictures had been in every newspaper in the country. She was Linda Carlton, of course!

"You're Miss Carlton, aren't you?" he demanded, excitedly. "The girl who flew to Paris alone?"

"Yes," answered Linda, indifferently. She didn't want to talk ancient history now. "This is a P C A—2, isn't it?" she inquired, to bring the man to the subject of autogiros.

"Yes. Fifteen thousand dollars. I suppose it's not necessary to tell *you* what instruments it is equipped with—an experienced flyer like yourself can recognize them by a glance into the pilot's cock-pit."

"Yes, I see them. And I had a circular besides. . . . It's complete, all right. The only

thing I don't like about it is the separate passenger's cock-pit. My Arrow Pursuit had a companion cock-pit."

"You can always talk to your passenger through the speaking-tube," the salesman reminded her.

"Yes, of course——"

"And nobody you take along now-a-days will be as talkative as I always was on our trips together," Louise observed, with a smile.

"Talkative!" repeated Linda. "All you ever wanted to do was sleep! Every time I looked at you on that flight to Canada, you were peacefully dozing!"

"And she still has a bad habit of dropping off," teased Ted.

"So long as that's the only way I 'drop off,' I'm satisfied," concluded Louise.

In spite of their frivolous talk, Linda had been thinking seriously about the autogiro, and had entirely made up her mind about it.

"I'll take it," she announced. "If you surely approve of it, Ted."

"I do, absolutely."

The salesman looked at her in amazement. Never had he made such an easy sale before.

But he did not meet people like Linda Carlton every day!

"Don't you want to try it out?" he suggested. "I can show you how to fly it in a few minutes."

"I have flown one before," she told him. "But I would like to take it up for a few minutes if you don't mind. Am I to have this particular one? I have a certified check in payment."

The salesman blinked his eyes in further consternation. The check right there, the girl ready to take the plane home with her! It was a moment before he could catch his breath.

"Of course," he finally managed to answer. "I'll have her started for you immediately. And—would your friends care to go up with you?"

"Sure!" exclaimed Ted. "We're your best friends, aren't we, Linda? So oughtn't we to be privileged with the first ride?"

"You certainly are!" replied the famous aviatrix, squeezing Louise's hand in her excitement and delight. "Come on!"

It was the Mackays' first flight in an autogiro, and though they were very much crowded in the passenger's cock-pit, they insisted that that only added to the fun. With a sureness

which Ted watched in admiration, Linda took off and flew round and round the field, putting the new plane through all sorts of tests, proving conclusively that all the claims for it were well-founded.

Fifteen minutes later they came slowly down to earth, landing on the exact spot from which Linda had taken off.

"Unscramble yourselves!" she cried to her passengers, as she climbed out of the cock-pit. "Let's go pay our bill."

"She's great, Linda!" approved Louise, as her husband helped her out. "I'm for her, even if she is a funny-looking bug."

"Sh!" cautioned Linda, solemnly. "You might hurt her feelings. She's—she's—a lady!"

"Ladybug!" exclaimed Louise, with a sudden burst of inspiration.

"Ladybug is right!" agreed her chum enthusiastically. "You've named her for me, Lou!"

Chapter II

The Aviation Job

"It's marvelous!" exclaimed Linda, as the salesman came to meet her after her test-flight in the autogiro. "Will you have her filled with gas and oil, while I sign the contract? I'll take her with me."

The salesman smiled at Ted Mackay.

"In the same way any other woman would buy a hat," he remarked, to Louise's amusement.

"You found it easy to fly, Miss Carlton?" he inquired.

"Wonderful!" she replied. "So simple that a child could almost do it! It certainly is the plane of the future, or of the present, I should say."

"We'll probably see one perched on everybody's roof within the next five years," teased Louise, although in reality she shared her chum's admiration for it.

While the mechanics gave the autogiro a thorough inspection, the little group strolled to the office to sign the papers and to meet the president of the company.

The salesman introduced Mr. Pitcairn, and added, proudly, "This is *the* Miss Carlton, of world-wide fame! The only woman who ever flew the Atlantic alone! And I have had the honor to sell Miss Carlton an autogiro!"

Linda blushed as she shook hands, and her eyelids fluttered in embarrassment. She could never get used to public admiration. Immediately she began to talk about her new possession.

"I want it for every-day flying," she explained. "I think it will be wonderful for that."

"We believe that it is," agreed the older man. "And we are honored indeed, Miss Carlton, that you have chosen it. It will be a feather in our cap."

"Miss Carlton never thinks of things like that," remarked Louise. "But I guess we're glad that she doesn't!"

While Linda signed the necessary papers, and handed her check to the salesman, the president inquired what her plans included now that

she had graduated from the Ground School with such success.

"I don't exactly know," she replied. "I want to get some kind of aviation job—I am more interested in the use of planes in every-day life than I am in races and spectacular events, though I understand that these have their place. Of course I haven't found anything to do yet, but I mean to try."

"You expect to give your whole time to flying?" asked the other. He had thought, naturally, that a girl in Linda Carlton's circumstances would just do it for sport.

"Yes—a regular full-time job. I'm not sure what—not selling planes, for I don't believe I'd care for that. And not the mail—unless I can't get anything else. You don't happen to know of any openings, do you, Mr. Pitcairn?"

"Let me see," he said. "Things are a little slow now. Of course there are the air-transportation companies, but their routes are about as cut-and-dried as the mail pilot's. . . . I take it you would rather have a little more excitement. . . . There's crop dusting, during the summer. You have heard of that, no doubt?"

"Yes, I have read about it."

"You know, then, that one plane flying over a field can spray as many plants in a day as a hundred of the ordinary spraying machines?"

His listeners gasped in astonishment. What marvelous advances in progress aviation was bringing about!

"I happen to know of a company in the South that is just forming," he continued. "Because of lack of capital, they are in great need of pilots with planes of their own. If you are interested, I am sure they would be glad to take you on."

"That sounds very interesting," agreed Linda, eagerly. "I'm sure I'd like that. And an autogiro ought to be especially adapted for this kind of thing. I could fly so low—and land so easily——"

"Exactly! Incidentally, you'd be doing our company a big favor by showing the public new uses for an autogiro. If Miss Carlton, of international reputation, flies anywhere, the account of it is sure to be in the newspapers!"

"I wouldn't count too much on that, Mr. Pitcairn," protested Linda, modestly. "I really am not 'news' any more. . . . But I shall be

grateful for the name of this firm, if you will write it down for me. Where is it located?"

"In Georgia—the southern part," he informed her. "Here is the address," he added, handing her a card. "And I will write myself today to tell them of their good fortune!"

"Georgia!" repeated Louise. "It's going to be awfully hot there, Linda. Compared with Green Falls—or even Spring City."

"Why not pick a job in Canada?" suggested Ted. "You'd like Canada, if you didn't choose the coldest part of the year to visit it."

Louise shuddered at the memory of their adventure during the preceding Christmas holidays.

"I never want to see Canada again!" she said. "And I don't believe Linda does either!"

It was not the memory of that cold night in the Canadian woods, or of the cruelty of the police, however, that made Linda frown and hesitate now. Nor did the heat of the South trouble her—weather was all in the day's work to her. But the thought of the distance between Georgia and Ohio, and what such a separation might mean to her Aunt Emily, deterred her

from accepting the offer immediately. It hardly seemed right to be away all winter and spring, and then to go far off again in the summer.

"Would I have to promise to do this all summer, if I took it on?" she inquired.

"No, certainly not. A month would be enough, for the first time. That would give you August with your family, Miss Carlton, before you accepted a regular aviation job in the fall."

This sounded much better to Linda, and she promised to write within the next week, if her father agreed.

It was lots of fun riding back to Spring City in her autogiro the following day, although she flew alone, for Louise wanted to return with Ted. Without a mishap of any kind she brought the "Ladybug" down on the field behind her house.

When she entered her home, she found that her father had arrived during her absence. He was waiting for her in the library.

"Daddy!" she cried, joyfully, for Mr. Carlton's visits were always a pleasant surprise to his only child. "You came at just the right time! Come out and see my Bug!"

"Must you call it that, Linda?" asked her

Aunt Emily, who, like all good housekeepers detested every sort of insect.

Linda laughed.

"Take a look at it, Aunt Emily, and see whether you could think of a better name."

Miss Carlton peered through the screen door.

"Where is it?" she asked.

"Come out on the porch, and you can see it," replied Linda.

Dragging her father and her aunt each by a hand, she gleefully skipped through the door.

"There!" she cried, as one who displays a marvel.

At the top of the hill, on the field behind the lovely Colonial house, they saw the new possession. Or rather, the top of the autogiro, for it was not wholly visible.

"It looks like a clothes-dryer to me," remarked Miss Carlton. "Or a wind-mill."

"But you agree that I couldn't call it my 'Clothes-dryer,' or my 'Wind-mill,' don't you, Aunt Emily? The words are too long. Besides, Lou thought of the cleverest name—the 'Lady-bug.' But you needn't worry, Auntie, she won't ever creep into your spotless house!"

"I should hope not!"

"In a way, Emily," observed Linda's father, "it's a good name as far as you are concerned. You hate planes—and you hate bugs!"

"Only, Aunt Emily is going to love my autogiro," insisted Linda, putting her arm affectionately about the older woman, who had been the only mother she had ever known. "One of my biggest reasons for choosing an autogiro was because it is the safest flying machine known." Her tone grew soft, so low that her father could not hear, and she added, with her head turned aside, "I do want you to know that I care about your feelings, Aunt Emily."

Miss Carlton's eyes grew misty; Linda had always been so sweet, so thoughtful! Her niece couldn't help it, if she had a marvelous brain, and a mechanical mind. No wonder she wanted to use them!

"It's going to be the ambition of my life to convert Aunt Emily to flying," she announced, in a gay tone. "See if I don't, Daddy!"

"I hope so," he said. "How about taking me up for a little fly?"

"A fly?" repeated Linda, playfully. "You a fly—and my new plane a bug! Oh, think of poor Aunt Emily!"

"Now, Linda, I do believe you're getting silly!"

But already she was pulling her father down the steps, eager to show off her beloved possession.

Mr. Carlton proved almost as enthusiastic as his daughter about it. When they returned to the house, he laughingly told his sister that he was thinking of buying one for himself, to use to fly back and forth from New York, where his business was located.

Miss Carlton groaned.

"Then we'll have two flying maniacs in the house!" she exclaimed.

"No—Linda and I will usually be up in the air," he corrected, "not often in the house."

Linda had scarcely time to change from her flyer's suit into an afternoon dress, and no chance at all to talk with her father about Mr. Pitcairn's suggestion about a job, when Ralph Clavering drove over to see her. Linda was delighted, of course; here was another person to whom she could display her autogiro. Ralph was a licensed pilot, too, although with him flying was only a secondary interest, and he had never had his own plane.

"Come out and see my 'Ladybug'!" she insisted. "And wouldn't you like to try her out? I might let you!"

"No, thanks, Linda—I'd be sure to do something wrong. Besides, I'd rather talk to you—those things make such an infernal noise. No, just show it to me, and then let's go and have a game of tennis before supper, if you're not too tired."

"I've almost forgotten how to play," replied the girl. "But I'll try. If you will come out and see my 'Ladybug' first."

After they had examined the autogiro, and were driving to the Country Club in Ralph's roadster, the young man turned the conversation to the topic of vacation at Green Falls, the resort at which Linda's aunt, and most of her friends, had spent the preceding summer. Ralph told Linda about a new motor boat that he was getting, and spoke of the contests in all sorts of sports that would be repeated this year.

"How soon do you think you can get off, Linda?" he concluded eagerly.

"Not till August, I'm afraid," she replied, to his dismay.

"August!" he repeated, in horror. "You're

not going to pull some new stunt on us, are you, Linda? Fly the Pacific—or the Arctic Ocean?"

The girl laughed, and shook her head.

"I'm through with stunts for a while, Ralph—you needn't worry about that. No; what I am planning now is steady work. I expect to take a job, as soon as Kit's wedding is over."

"A job? Where?"

"In Georgia, probably." She went into details about the proposition.

"You would!" he muttered, sulkily. "And pick out such a hot spot, that nobody would want to go with you . . . Linda, why can't you be sensible like other girls—like my sister Kit, for instance?"

"Kit?"

"Yes. And get married."

He leaned over hopefully, and put his hand on her arm. Now that Linda had accomplished her ambition in flying the Atlantic, perhaps she would be willing to settle down to marriage and a normal life.

But she drew away, smiling.

"Don't, Ralph!" she warned him. "Remember that you promised me you wouldn't ask me till you had finished college."

"All right, all right," he muttered, irritably, resolving that he wouldn't again. Let her wait awhile! She'd probably get tired of working after she'd had a taste of it for a month in that hot climate.

They met Dot Crowley and Jim Valier at the tennis courts, and doubled up with them for a couple of sets. But they were badly beaten, for these two were the best team at the Club.

After dinner that evening Linda had a chance to tell her father and her aunt of her proposed plan for the coming month, and won their consent, when she announced her intention of spending August at Green Falls. To Miss Carlton she put the all-important question of clothes; the older woman promised to get her half a dozen flyer's suits of linen for the trip.

During the next week Linda accepted enough invitations to satisfy even her Aunt Emily, and she wore one new dress after another, and flitted from tennis match or picnic to tea or dance, as the program happened to be. The grand finale was Kitty's wedding, at the girl's beautiful home just outside of Spring City.

It was a gorgeous affair, and Linda could not help thinking how Bess Hulbert, the Lieu-

tenant's sister, would have enjoyed it, had she not given her life in the attempt to win the big prize which Linda herself had captured. Personally, she did not like the affair nearly so much as Louise's simple wedding at Easter.

Linda was quiet as she drove home beside her Aunt Emily in the limousine. She could not help wondering whether this event did not mark the end of her girlhood, the beginning of her career as a self-supporting woman—out in the world. No longer would she be free to come and go as she liked, to see her old friends at any and all hours of the day and evening. The thought was a little saddening, and she sighed.

Her aunt laid her hand over her niece's.

"Why the sigh, dear?" she inquired. "Tired?"

Linda nodded.

"Yes—and weddings are so solemn—so sort of sad, aren't they, Auntie? To the other people, I mean—for of course there's nothing sad about Kit and Tom. But it means I won't see them much——"

"It isn't their wedding that causes that, dear," Miss Carlton reminded her. "Kitty and Tom will be back and forth often, I think, for

they are not living far away. . . . But it's you who are leaving the rest, Linda. Oh, if you only wouldn't go so far away, dear!"

"I guess you're right, Aunt Emily," admitted the other. "But I can't have my cake and eat it too. There isn't any flying job in Spring City."

Miss Carlton was silent; there was no use in going over the old argument. Instead, she asked:

"How soon do you go, Linda?"

"Tomorrow—if the weather is good. I received my map and my instructions several days ago. I'm all ready. The Ladybug's in perfect shape."

"If you only didn't have to go alone!" sighed the older woman.

"Yes. If I only had Lou!"

"Couldn't you take some other girl?"

"As a matter of fact, I did suggest such a thing to Dot Crowley. She's competent, you know—has her pilot's license—and she's such a peach of a girl. I know we'd get along beautifully together. But she's all tied up with a tennis match, and can't possibly leave now."

Little did Linda think, as she took off the fol-

lowing morning in the bright June sunshine, how deeply she was to regret this decision of Dot's, how she was to wish a hundred times within the next week that she had some companion who was a friend.

For the people she fell among proved to be the worst sort of associates.

Chapter III

Kidnaped

As there was no particular hurry about the trip South—it was only June twentieth—Linda decided to go slowly and to stop often. What a marvelous way to see the country, at the most beautiful time of the year! In an autogiro the flight would never become monotonous, for she could fly low enough to watch the landscape.

Ohio—Kentucky—Tennessee—Georgia! Each day she could travel through a different state, putting up each night at a hotel. Fortunately her Aunt Emily had given up worrying about her staying alone in strange cities. For Linda had already proved herself capable of taking care of herself.

"It is because Linda is always so dignified," Mr. Carlton had remarked to his sister. "The girls who make chance acquaintances, and permit familiarities are usually looking for it. Linda's mind is on her plane—on her naviga-

tion—and she is too absorbed to be bothered. I think we are safe, Emily, in trusting her."

"I suppose so," Miss Carlton had agreed. "Though of course she'll always be a little girl to me."

The day after the wedding was warm and the skies were clear; the Ladybug was in perfect condition, and her forty gallon tank was filled with gasoline, so Linda decided to carry out her plan. While her Aunt Emily packed her lunch basket and a box with an emergency supply of food, the girl called Miss Hawkins on the telephone as she had promised.

"But don't put it into the paper until after I start," begged Linda. "I always like to slip off quietly, without any fuss."

"I'll save it for the evening editions," agreed the reporter. "And then you'll be well on your way. . . . And, thank you again, Miss Carlton."

An hour later she bade her aunt good-by, and was off. Heading her plane south-west, she would avoid the mountains in Kentucky, and pass over the blue-grass region, of which she had so often read. It was an ideal day for a flight, and her heart beat with the same exulta-

tion she had always felt when she was in the air; there was no feeling to compare with it on earth. Someone had said it was like being in love—but Linda Carlton had never been in love herself.

For several hours this sense of joy possessed her; then, as noontime came, and she landed to eat her lunch, she suddenly grew lonely. If only Louise were with her! She sighed as she thought that from now on she would probably be traveling alone.

It grew hotter in the afternoon as she progressed farther south, but her engine was functioning so beautifully that she hated to stop. Then the sun went down, and the coolness was so delightful after the heat that she continued on her course longer than she had planned, and did not land until she had crossed the border into Tennessee. There she followed a beacon light that led to an air-port, and brought the Ladybug down to earth.

No sooner had she brought the autogiro to a stop than a group of curious people surrounded her.

"What do you-all call this?" drawled a big,

good-natured looking man, with the typical Southern accent. "It's a new one on me."

Linda smiled and explained, asking that the autogiro be housed for the night, and inquired her way to the hotel.

"The hotel ain't so good," replied the man. "But I can direct you to a fine boarding-house."

Everybody that Linda met in this little town was kindness itself. She found herself in a pleasant home, with a marvelous supper of real old-fashioned Southern cooking, all ready for her. It appeared to be the custom to eat late in the South; no one thought it strange that she should want her supper at nine o'clock.

These good people's hospitality only served to strengthen her confidence in the fact that she was safe in traveling alone. For this reason the shock was all the greater for her when that trust was so rudely shaken later on during the trip.

Linda liked the town so well that she decided to remain a day, and go over her Ladybug herself. For, she argued sensibly, if no one there had ever heard of an autogiro before, it stood to reason that there would be little chance of a competent inspection by anyone but herself.

Although Miss Hawkins, the reporter, had published the facts concerning her trip that evening, the news had not reached this town in Tennessee immediately. It was not until the next day that the story was reprinted, and someone discovered that this stranger in the autogiro who was visiting them was Linda Carlton of international fame. Then the news spread like wild-fire about the town, and the band was gotten out to give the girl a royal welcome.

It was hardly necessary, with all this celebration, to wire her aunt of her safe arrival in Tennessee; nevertheless Linda did so, as she had promised when she left home.

Her next day's journey brought her across Tennessee, over the mountains where she had a chance to test her plane's climbing ability, and into Georgia. Here again she was received with hospitality. It seemed almost as if she were making a "good-will" flight, so delighted were the people to greet her and make her at home.

A long flight lay ahead of her—across Georgia, the largest state in the southeast. Over the mountains in the northern part, across cotton and rice and sweet-potato plantations, towards the coast. The weather was hot and dry;

she grew tired and thirsty, and the thought of her friends, enjoying the cool breezes at Green Falls made her envious for a while. But she carried plenty of water in her thermos flasks, and she reminded herself that she was having a more thrilling experience than they could possibly have. Tonight she could rest—and sleep.

Her head ached and her body was weary, as she looked at her map and tried to find out just where she was from the land-marks. Dismay took hold of her as she realized that she must have gone off of her course—beyond her destination. The ground below appeared marshy, in many spots entirely covered with water, in which water-lilies and rushes grew in abundance. Where could she possibly be?

Panic seized her as she realized that this was no place to land. Even an autogiro couldn't come down in a swamp. She circled around, and went back. If the light only held out until she reached some sort of level, hard ground!

She thought of her flight over the ocean, when she had been so absolutely alone, and she felt the same desolation, the same fierce terror.

Where was she? Where was she going? Wild-eyed, she studied her map.

Then she located herself. This must be the Okefenokee Swamp, in the southeastern part of Georgia. That lonely, forsaken land, some parts of which had never been penetrated by a white man! Treacherous, dangerous ground, which would mean certain death if she attempted to land! Miles and miles of desolation, that only an Indian could safely explore!

There was nothing to do but head the plane towards the west, in hope of passing over the swamp. The sun had set, and darkness was coming on, but Linda could still see the ground beneath her. The water grew scarcer, and trees—pine and cypress—here and there dotted the land. But still the earth looked marshy, too treacherous for a landing.

A terrifying thought seized her when she remembered that she had not filled her gasoline tank that morning. Glancing at the indicator, she saw that she had only three gallons left. Would that be enough to take her out of this "trembling land," which was the meaning of the Indian word, "Okefenokee"?

It was like a horrible night-mare, watching

the decreasing gasoline supply, the fading light, and the trees and the swamp beneath her. Her breath came in gasps; the idea of death in a swamp was more horrible than that of drowning in the middle of the Atlantic, for the former would be a lingering torture.

But at last to her delight she saw the trees widen, and a level stretch of dry sand below. This must be an island, she concluded, for she had read that there were half a dozen or so of these in the swamp, and that they were several miles in length. If this were true, she could land, and be safe for the night at least.

She brought her autogiro lower, and with her flash-light and her glasses examined the ground. Yes, there was space enough for a landing, with a plane like hers. She uttered a gasp of relief.

But she had rejoiced too soon, for when she lifted her eyes from the ground to the level of her plane she was startled breathless by the sight of another plane, which had come out of nowhere, apparently, and was rushing madly at her. As if it were actually aiming to crash into her! As if this were warfare, and the oncoming plane an enemy, intent upon her destruction!

In that instant she realized that this was an old plane—possibly one of those abandoned by the Army—one that would not now pass inspection. No wonder it was tipping so strangely; it must be out of the pilot's control.

Linda did the only thing possible, for she was too low to turn. She dropped gracefully to the ground, avoiding a tree by a few inches. Thank goodness, it was solid beneath her!

The other plane was landing too, she observed, landing with a speed that was ten times that of the autogiro, in a space that was far too small. The inevitable occurred; Linda closed her eyes as she saw it about to crash. A terrifying thud followed; then a scream of fright—and Linda opened her eyes to see the plane on its side, nosed into a bank of bushes. Had it not been for that undergrowth, the wreck would have been far worse than it was.

Linda had turned off her engine, and she jumped out of the autogiro immediately and rushed to the scene of the disaster. What a smash it was! No one would ever fly that plane again!

Two people were lying tangled up in the

wreckage, whether dead or alive Linda could not immediately tell.

At her approach the man in the rear cock-pit opened his eyes and began to move his hands and legs.

"Got a good knife, Linda?" he yelled, to the girl's profound astonishment.

"I'll get one," she replied, wondering how he could possibly know her name. Or was he delirious, and thought he was talking to some other Linda?

Hurrying back to her own plane she took out her thermos flasks and her tool-kit, and returned to the spot of the wreck. It was too dark now to see the men distinctly, until she turned on her flash-light. As she came closer, she saw that the man who had spoken was wriggling himself free. His face was scratched, blood was running down his hands, but he apparently was not seriously hurt.

"Lucky this is an open plane," he muttered. "Now give me a hand, me girl!"

Linda did not like his tone, but she could not refuse to help a human being in distress. Gradually he crawled out.

"Now for Susie!" he announced, as he raised himself unsteadily on his legs.

Linda gasped. Was the other occupant a woman? A thrill of relief passed over her, for she had been terrified at the idea of being alone with such a hard-looking man in this desolate spot.

"A girl?" she stammered, pressing close to the plane.

"Yeah. Me wife. Her name's Susie."

Linda flashed the light under the wreckage of the plane, and distinguished a young woman in a flyer's suit. She was unconscious.

Without another word they both set silently to work to disentangle her. At last they dragged her out—still unconscious. But she evidently was still alive, though the man remarked that her arm must be broken—and maybe an ankle or two. He seemed very matter-of-fact about it all.

"What's in that flask?" he demanded abruptly, of Linda.

"Water," she replied.

"Water!" he snarled angrily. "Water!"

He looked as if he meant to hit her, and Linda recoiled in terror.

"Go hunt my flask in that wreck!" he commanded.

"Do it yourself!" returned Linda, with sudden spirit. "How do I know that that plane won't burst into flames any minute?"

She was surprised at her sudden display of independence; she had always depended upon Louise to stick up for their rights. But she had risen to the occasion, now that she was alone.

The man started to swear, when suddenly the girl on the ground opened her eyes.

"Take care, Slats!" she begged, to Linda's astonishment. "We'll need this girl and her plane—for I can't fly now!"

The man called "Slats" subsided, and went over to the wreckage. Linda bent over the injured "Susie," and put the flask of water to her lips.

Like the man's, the girl's face was scratched and bleeding, and she began to moan of the pain in her wrist. Her helmet had been pushed off, and her blond hair hung about her face. Her lips were painted a brighter red than even blood could have colored them.

"Where are you hurt?" asked Linda, wiping

the girl's face with her handkerchief, and pushing the hair out of her eyes.

"My wrist, worst. And this ankle. And my back."

"If I have enough gasoline, we'll take you to a hospital in my plane."

"No! No!" cried the girl, in terror.

"Why not?" questioned Linda.

"You'll find out," replied the other, mysteriously, closing her eyes in pain.

Linda had no way of guessing what she meant, so she sat waiting in silence until the man returned. Five minutes later he appeared with a tank of gasoline, and a flask of brandy, which he gave to his wife to drink.

"We're ready to go now, Linda," he announced. "You can help me carry Susie over to your Bug."

Again Linda started violently at the mention of her own name.

"Do you really know me?" she asked.

"Sure we do! You're Linda Carlton. Think you're about the smartest thing there is in the air today. Bought one of them new-fangled bugs. Ain't that right?"

"Partly," admitted Linda, wincing at the slur in his remark. "But how could you possibly know?"

"Because we are out to get you. Wasn't your story in all the newspapers, tellin' all about this trip of your'n? And ain't your Bug the easiest thing to spot in the air?"

"Out to get me!" repeated Linda. "Do you mean that you wanted to kill me?"

"No, lady. You're more use to us alive than dead—for a while, anyway. No. Our gang decided we could pick up a hundred grand easier by kidnaping you than by swiping jewelry. It was my idea!" He swelled with pride, believing himself exceedingly clever. "And that's what you get for wanting to have your picture and glories in the papers all the time!"

Linda listened wild-eyed to this information, and edged closer to Susie, as if her only protection would be found in the girl.

"So now these is your orders: You fly us to our camp tonight, and we'll keep you there. You can sleep with Susie. We won't hurt you, if you do what we tell you, and don't get fresh, or try to get away. Once you do that, we shoot.

And believe me, I can aim—O.K. I've had a sight of practice in my business! I'm a mighty successful man—in my line."

"And what is your line, outside of kidnaping?" asked Linda.

"High-class robbery. Banks. Big jewels. We don't never hold up nobody on the street, for a few dollars. To petty for us! Nope! We're big men. Slick! Clever! Ask Susie!"

"Does Susie like all this?"

"Sure she does. We winter in Europe, and South America, and she struts around with all the big dames, flashing diamonds and duds that make 'em all look pale. . . . Now come along!"

It was useless to argue or talk any more, so Linda did as she was told, and together they got Susie into the passenger's cock-pit of the autogiro. Her husband sat with her, holding his pistol up threateningly at the back of Linda's head.

"Go where I tell you!" he ordered.

"I haven't much gas," she protested.

"I've got an extra flask here. But I'm not pouring it in till we need it, which I don't think we will. The camp ain't far—on Black Jack Island."

"Black Jack Island," Linda repeated to herself. "What an appropriate name!"

She was terrified, of course, but there was nothing to do except follow directions, and in a few minutes she brought the plane down on the island that the man had specified.

"Leave the Bug here, Linda," he commanded, as he lifted Susie out of the plane. "And go ahead of me, as I tell you."

For several minutes the little procession made their way to the center of the island, over the white sand towards the cypress and pine trees that grew in greater profusion. Linda did not look back, but she knew that while "Slats" carried Susie with one arm, he kept his pistol at her back with his other hand.

At last, by the aid of her flash-light, Linda spied several tents set up near together, and a welcome smell of food cooking greeted her as she advanced.

"Stop here!" came the order. "This is where you spend the night!"

Chapter IV

Captive

Linda and her companions stopped in front of a large tent that was dimly lighted within by a lantern. Two men were standing inside—one bending over an oil cook-stove, the other at the door.

"We got Linda!" announced "Slats" triumphantly. "Without even smashing her plane!"

He pushed through the doorway, past the other man, and deposited Susie on a cot by the wall of the tent.

The man at the stove, a big, fat, repulsive looking brute, turned around and uttered an ugly, "Hah!"

"Susie hurt?" inquired the tall, thin man who had been standing at the edge of the tent.

"Yeah. Crashed her plane. I've got some scratches meself, but I ain't whinin'!"

"My ankle's broken!" sobbed Susie, unable

to suffer any longer in silence. "Hurry up and get some bandages, Doc!"

Linda, who had been standing perfectly still during this conversation, was startled by the use of the name "Doc." Was it possible that this man was a physician? If so, wouldn't he perhaps be above the level of the others—and might she not expect, if not sympathy, at least fair play from him? But "Slats" instantly shattered her hopes with his explanation.

"This is the 'Doc,' Linda," he said. "We call him that because he fixes up all our aches and cuts for us. In a profession like our'n, it ain't safe to meddle with 'saw-bones' and hospitals. They keep records."

Linda smiled at the idea of calling robbery a "profession," but she made no comment.

"So long as you'll be with us fer a while," continued her captor, "I'll interduce you to everybody. That there cook is 'Beefy.' Ain't he a good ad for his own cookin'?"

Linda nodded; she could hardly be expected to laugh at such a poor joke under the circumstances.

"You can go over and wash—there's water in

Susie's tent—if you want to, while the 'Doc' fixes Susie up. Then we'll eat.''

Glad to be alone for a moment, Linda stepped across to the tent which the man had indicated, hidden behind some pine trees a few yards away. Guiding herself by her flash-light, she found the entrance, and dropped down on a cot inside.

Letting the light go off, she sat, dry-eyed and utterly hopeless, staring into the darkness. What terrible fate was hanging over her, she dared not imagine. Would they torture her, perhaps, if her father refused to raise the ransom, and called the police to his aid?

In these last few hours she had learned to realize how infinitely crueler human-beings were than the elements of nature. The ice and snow, the cold winds of Canada, or the vast, trackless depths of the Atlantic could never bring about such untold agony as these fiends in human form. She almost wished that she had gone down, like Bess Hulbert, in the ocean, before she had lived to learn how evil men could be.

A call from the mess-tent, as she supposed the larger one to be, aroused her from her un-

happy meditations, and she hastily turned on the light and washed from a pitcher of water on a soap-box in Susie's tent.

When she returned to the group, she found them already seated about a board table, plunging into the food like hungry animals. Susie, who sat with her bandaged ankle propped up on a box, was the only one who ate with any manners at all. But it had been a long time since Linda had tasted food, and she was too hungry to be deterred by the sight of "Beefy" putting his fingers into his plate. So she sat down next to Susie, and silently started to eat.

She found the meal exceedingly good, and was surprised at her own appetite, for she hardly expected to be able to enjoy anything under the circumstances.

The lantern threw a weird, ghastly light over the strange, ugly faces about her, and the silence was unbroken, except by the noise and clatter of eating. A tenseness took possession of her; she wished desperately that somebody would say something. It was exactly like a horrible dream, whose spell could not be destroyed. And still no one uttered a word until the meal was concluded.

"You girls can go to bed now," Slats announced, finally. "I'll carry you over, Susie, and give you a gun, in case Linda tries to sneak off in the night." He smiled with vicious triumph.

"I'm afraid that wouldn't do me any good," replied Linda, trying to make her voice sound normal. "I haven't an idea where I am."

"On Black Jack Island, in the Okefenokee Swamp," he again told her. "With water all around you. Get that! You can't get away, without a boat or a plane. And I'm tellin' you now, I seen to it that your Bug's bone-dry!"

With a conceited grin, he leaned over and picked up his wife so roughly that she cried out in pain.

When they were alone, the girls took off some of their outer garments, and lay down on their cots. Linda longed to talk, but she was afraid to begin, for fear it would only lead to some sort of punishment. So she lay still, trying to forget her troubles, to believe everything would come out right in the end, when her father paid the ransom.

She was just dozing off, when she was abruptly aroused by agonized sobs from her tentmate. She sat up and asked her companion

whether there was anything she could get her. But Susie did not answer; she continued to cry wildly like a child of six.

"Oh, my ankle! My ankle!" she moaned. And then she used worse language than any Linda had ever heard—from man or woman.

Linda was sorry for her, but she could not help contrasting this girl's cowardice in the face of physical pain with Dot Crowley's, when the latter had met with a similar accident, and had smiled bravely at the hurt. She thought, too, of Ted Mackay's courage in the hospital, and Susie suffered by the comparisons.

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked, again.

"No. Only take me to a *real* doctor—or a hospital."

"I'd be glad to, if your husband would let me fly my plane!"

"Well, he won't!" There followed more oaths. "What does he care—so long as he ain't the one that's hurt?" She continued to cry hysterically, until a snarling order came from without the tent.

"Shut up your noise!" bawled her husband, and Susie softened her sobbing.

Linda lay very still, thinking. Dared she suggest that the other girl deceive her husband—or would she only be punished for such an idea? She decided to give it a try.

"You must know where the men keep the gasoline," she whispered. "Wouldn't you rather have your ankle fixed right, and not run the chance of being a cripple for life?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Susie, raising her head from her pillow.

"I mean—wait till the men are asleep, and then you tell me where the gas is, and we'll sneak off. I'd take you to a hospital, and I'd promise never to tell on you."

"And lose all that ransom money? Slats'd never forgive me!"

"But what good's money, if you're a cripple?" countered Linda.

"Yeah—I see what you mean," agreed Susie. "Only we'd never get away with it. They'd hear us gettin' out—remember I can't walk by myself. . . . No, Linda—it's no go."

Disappointed, Linda dropped back on the cot, seeing that further argument was no use, and, fortunately, fell quickly asleep. Had she not been so tired, she would probably have been

disturbed during the night, for Susie tossed and moaned without any regard for her companion. But Linda slept the sleep of exhaustion.

Just as dawn was beginning to show a faint light through the door of the tent, Linda was rudely awakened by a gruff voice. Startled, she looked into the unpleasant face of Susie's husband, and she shuddered as she recalled where she was. The thought flashed into her mind that soldiers and criminals were usually shot at sunrise, and her hands shook with fear. What was the man going to do to her?

"Get up, Linda!" he commanded. "You're working today."

"Working?"

"Yeah. Flying."

"Where?" she demanded, with a trace of hope. If she were allowed to fly, there might be some hope of escape.

"Across the swamp. To an island out in the ocean."

"Oh!"

An island! It sounded like imprisonment. She thought of Napoleon on St. Helena, and she remembered the stories of the cruelties to the French convicts, sentenced to die on an island.

Terrible climate, probably, reeking with disease. A slow death that would be far greater torture than being shot—hours of lingering agony, when she would think of her father and her aunt, and of the suffering that she was causing them! And, worst of all, no one to rescue her, as Ted had twice saved her from disasters that were not half so dreadful!

But she did not cry; she was disgusted with tears after the way that Susie had carried on the night before, over her sprained ankle. After all, it was no one else's fault that she had selected this job; she had taken it on, and she must see it through, no matter what the outcome.

When she had washed and dressed, she walked over to the big tent, where she found breakfast ready. Bacon and eggs and coffee—and even oranges! Evidently they meant to feed her well—for this much she could be thankful.

She ate in silence with the three men, for Slats did not carry Susie to the table. When they had finished, and the men were lighting their pipes, Slats pushed back his tin plate and began to talk.

"Our idea in running you down was to get a neat little ransom, Linda," he repeated, with the same triumphant grin which she had grown to loathe. She winced, too, at each repetition of her first name, though there was no way that she could stop him from using it.

"We figgered your old man could come across with a couple hundred thousand to get you back. When we get ready, we'll let him know. But in the meantime, we ain't ready."

He winked knowingly at Beefy, and a cold shiver of fear crept over Linda. If they would only get the thing over quickly! Anything would be better than the awful suspense.

The speaker laughed at her expression of terror.

"Don't be scared, Linda. We ain't a goin' a hurt you. . . . It just happens we need you for a couple days in our business."

"Your business?" she faltered.

"Yeah. We got some jewelry right here in this tent worth about a hundred grand. We fly across to an island with it, where a steamer picks it up and gets it to our agent in South America."

"But what has that to do with me?" asked

Linda. Did they mean to leave her on the island, or send her to South America?

"Just this: we're usin' your Bug and you as pilot fer the job. Susie's the only one of our gang can fly, and now she and the Jenny are busted, we'll use you. Get me?"

Linda nodded, sadly. So she was to be made to play a criminal part in their ugly game! How she wished they would be caught!

"And you needn't scheme to get away," Slats added. "Because I'll be right behind you, with me gun loaded!"

Linda made no reply; after all there was nothing to be said. She must take his orders, or be instantly killed.

"Ready now?" he inquired, satisfied with her silence. "We always work early in the day. Maybe you better come over with me and take a look at your plane, and I'll give you some gas. See if she's O.K."

Dutifully Linda accompanied the man to the edge of the island, and there was the autogiro, safe and sound as ever—her only friend in the world, it seemed!

She looked about her at the marshy water,

the trees and vegetation of the swamp, and then up into the sky, which she searched vainly for an air-plane. But except for the birds, there was no sign of life in that desolate, vast expanse of land and sky. Not a human habitation in sight!

Desperately, she wished that she could think of some plan to outwit this lawless gang, but everything seemed hopeless, as long as Slats carried that pistol aimed at her head. So she meekly inspected the autogiro and climbed into the cock-pit.

Her companion was in a good humor; he was enjoying the whole situation immensely, pleased at his own cleverness. He liked to fly, and he admired the autogiro; he even went so far as to say he believed he'd keep this one for Susie.

Linda said nothing, but she was thinking what a mistake that would be for him to make. Much as she would hate to lose her autogiro, she realized that its possession would give the gang away to the police. It was one thing to steal jewelry and money, and another to take a plane, of a make of which there were only perhaps a hundred in existence.

They flew over the trees, eastward to the prairie land, and then on through the coastal plain to the Atlantic Ocean. Whether they were crossing Florida or Georgia, Linda did not know, and for once she was not interested in the country. The sun rose as they came to the water, but that beautiful sight, too, made no impression upon the unhappy girl. Nothing but the sight of a plane or a boat—the promise of rescue—could have any meaning for her.

On and on she went, leaving the land behind them, until finally they sighted an island possibly five miles out. The man behind her shouted to her to land, and she circled about, finally coming down on the beach.

As she brought her autogiro to earth, she was once more impressed by the loneliness, the barrenness of it all. No habitation of any kind, not even a tent! Motionless she sat in the cock-pit, wondering whether she couldn't get away while this thief was unloading his treasure.

Slats, however, was too wise for any such trick; he commanded Linda to get out of the plane, and help him carry a heavy box across the island where a growth of bushes concealed

a hole in the ground, which was evidently the pre-arranged hiding-place. In silence they buried the treasure and returned to the auto-giro.

Retracing their course under his direction, Linda flew back to the encampment. Here they found the others finishing their lunch, and Susie was sitting with them, apparently much brighter and better, for she was laughing and talking to her companions.

As Linda and her captor finished their meal, a stranger put in his stealthy appearance at the door of the tent. He was well-dressed, in riding-breeches, and clean-shaven. Linda's heart gave a wild bound of hope. Was it possible that this man was an officer of the law, and the criminals were caught?

But Beefy's greeting to the visitor instantly dispelled her hopes.

"Hello, Jake!" he exclaimed. "What's new?"

"Everything ripe for tonight," announced the new-comer, briefly. "Ready to start now?"

Slats stood up. "O.K. with me," he said. "Want some grub first, Jake?"

"No—I just ate." The stranger turned smilingly to Linda. "And how's the most famous girl-pilot in the world?"

Linda recoiled in horror. So he too knew all about the plot to catch her! Another member of this terrible gang!

As she did not answer, he shrugged his shoulders.

"Got the lines out about her yet?" he inquired, of the other men.

"No," replied Slats. "We had a smash-up —wrecked Susie and the Jenny, so we'll need Linda to fly her plane for us till this job's over tonight. I'll give you the high sign when I'm ready to let her old man know."

The four men stood together at the door of the tent.

"We're leaving for a day—maybe two," Slats informed Linda. "But Susie's watching you, with a gun. And your plane's dry, so I wouldn't advise to try any get-away. There's swamps everywhere. . . .

"So long. . . ."

A moment later the girls heard the men tramp away to the boat that the new-comer had brought to the edge of the island.

Chapter V

Escape

It was with a sigh of relief that Linda watched her captors disappear. Not that she had any hope of getting free—without gasoline—but at least she would not see those dreadful men for a few hours. Susie was not nearly so bad.

"I hope you can cook," remarked the latter, surveying her bandaged ankle.

"Oh, yes," replied Linda. "I've often camped out before."

"Then we can enjoy ourselves for a while. I'm glad to get rid of that gang. . . . And, Linda—how 'bout if we be friends? No use making things worse by getting mad at *me*."

"True," admitted Linda, though she wondered what she could possibly find in common with the other girl that might inspire friendship.

Seeing a kettle of water steaming on the oil-

stove, she set herself to the task of washing the dishes.

"Wish I could help," remarked Susie, in a friendly tone. "But after this there won't be so many dishes—for just the two of us."

"When do you expect them back?" inquired her prisoner.

"Tomorrow morning, probably. If they get their loot."

"Suppose they get caught?" suggested Linda.

"They won't. Don't worry! They've been planning this crack for months, and you can bet everything's all set just right. They never get caught."

Linda sighed. It wasn't very promising.

"Tell me how you got into a gang like this?" she asked, suddenly.

"I fell for Slats," replied the other girl. "Thought he was a rich guy—he spent so much money on me. I was working as a clerk at an air-port, and learning to fly. We ran off and got married."

"But when you discovered that he wasn't straight, why didn't you leave him?"

"Couldn't. He said he'd hunt me down, and

'bump me off,' if I did. And he meant it, too. Slats isn't afraid of anything. . . . I saw right away that he didn't want a wife, but a pilot, who'd do what he said. . . . The only fun I get out of it is in the winter, when we go to Europe or South America, and live like swells. Then he lets me spend all the money I want."

"But doesn't it make you feel dreadful—at night, sometimes, or when you're alone—to think of leading such a wicked life?"

"Now, Linda, be yourself!" answered Susie, flippantly. "No preaching! From you, or anybody else!"

Linda turned away and completed her task in silence. What was the use of talking to a person like that? She knew now what was meant by the term "hard-boiled." If ever a word described anyone, that word described Susie.

She wondered, as she worked, whether it would be worth-while to repeat her suggestion of the night before. Susie's ankle was so much better today that she would not be so eager to get to a real doctor. Still, there could be no harm in trying.

"Wouldn't you like to go off in my autogiro today?" she inquired, without turning around.

Her companion laughed bitterly.

"Not a chance!" she replied. "Didn't you see Beefy take that big can to the boat with him? That was *gas*."

"Oh!" exclaimed Linda, her hopes dashed to the ground. "You mean they don't trust you?"

"They don't trust anybody!" announced the other girl, emphatically. "It don't pay—in a game like theirs."

"Would you have gone with me?" inquired Linda. "If they hadn't taken it?"

"I don't know. My ankle's better. But I'm sick and tired of Slats, though I guess I'd miss the cash and the excitement. And I guess I'd be too scared he'd get me in the end if I double-crossed him."

Linda was silent. Now that this hope was frustrated, she must think of something else. Surely this was her chance of escape—with the men away, and her only companion a cripple.

But the swamp—the dreadful swamp was all about her. How far into the depth of the Okefenokee she was, she did not know. It was all a vast unexplored wilderness to her.

"Alive with snakes and wild animals, and

alligators, I suppose," she mused. Yet nothing savage could be worse than those three fiends in human flesh who were holding her captive. She determined to face anything rather than them. Yes; she would run away, if it meant swimming the swamp!

There was no use loading herself down with food, she concluded, for most of her trip would be through the water. She would stop at her plane and take out some chocolate, and her knife; thus lightly equipped, she would face the wilderness alone.

"Linda," said Susie, interrupting these thoughts, "will you go to my tent and get me a magazine I have there? I think it's under the cot."

Linda nodded, repressing a smile. She would go, but she would not come back!

Stepping into the smaller tent, she dropped the flap, and picked up her flash-light. Then, raising the wall on the other side, she crept out through the trees to the edge of the island and circled about until she reached the autogiro. This would give her a few minutes extra before Susie should realize that she had gone.

As she stood there beside her plane for a

moment, wondering whether she would ever see it again, she had her first real sight of the Okefenokee Swamp from the ground. Cypress and slash pine trees grew in abundance, and heavy moss hung about. In the water all around her, she noticed rushes and water-lilies, and ferns grew everywhere in profusion. Beneath the surface, she could see thick vegetation; would this, she wondered, support her weight if she were to attempt to walk in it?

In the afternoon sunlight the water, the trees, were perfectly still; except for the birds, the silence was profound. How desolate it was! Her wrist-watch informed her that it was already four o'clock. Five hours more, and darkness would come on, enveloping everything in a blackness such as a city-dweller never sees. Even the sky might be hidden by the trees, and the wild animals would be prowling stealthily about in search of food. She shuddered and hesitated.

"But I have an even chance with the animals," she thought. "And with those thieves, I am sure to lose!" So valiantly, she stepped out into the water.

The depth was not great at this point, and

she discovered that, though the soft muck sunk beneath her feet, she could still make progress. The hard rains of July and August had not yet set in, and the "bays," as the stretches of shallow water were called, had not risen to any great height.

Laboriously she waded onward, choosing a thick growth of trees in the distance as her goal. Surely, she thought, where the trees could grow there must be some dry land. If she could make that spot by nightfall, she could hide in their depths and sleep. Then tomorrow she could press on to the westward, and perhaps reach the end of the swamp.

It was a slow, weary progress that she accomplished, and she had to pick her way carefully, measuring the depth of the water with a stick which she had cut from a pine on Black Jack Island, but she kept resolutely on until her watch registered seven o'clock. Then, all of a sudden, the stick sunk so deeply into the muck that she knew she would have to swim, and she hastily ate the chocolate which was to be her evening meal, and plunged forward to swim.

As the time slowly passed, she watched Black Jack Island fading in the distance, and hope

swelled in her heart. She was nearing land at last—perhaps only an island—but even if she were not out of the swamp, at least she would be away from her enemies. She smiled when she pictured the consternation and anger of the men at finding her gone.

She swam on for some distance, now and then pausing to cut the grasses that became entangled about her legs. Her shoes were heavy, but she hated to take them off, for they were a help in the shallow water.

After an hour of this exercise, she was utterly exhausted, and she looked about her in dismay. What if she should drown now, in the midst of her own country—after she had conquered the Atlantic Ocean successfully? The thought was absurd; she steeled herself to press forward, for she was coming nearer to that bank of trees. Surely, there lay safety!

Had she but known it, she was now entering one of the so-called "Gator Roads" of the swamp—channels of water which the alligators followed. But it looked promising to the tired, hungry girl.

The foliage was growing thicker now, and the

water-way narrowing. Some distance on, the trees met overhead, and beautiful moss hung from their branches, shutting out the setting sunlight, and forming a lovely green bower. But Linda was scarcely conscious of this beauty, for she was breathing with difficulty, panting with fatigue. If she could only make that bank —where the land seemed firm!

A big tree had fallen across the water, and she managed to reach it, and to cling to it for support while she rested. Her feet hung down in the muck, and she realized that the water was comparatively shallow. She wanted to laugh aloud in her relief.

Pulling herself up by her hands, she decided to walk the log to the bank, and had just poised herself upon its rather perilous round surface, when she encountered the greatest shock in her life thus far. Not ten yards away, in the very water where she would have been now, had she not mounted the log—was an alligator, at least eight feet long! Brave as she was usually in the face of other dangers, she let out a piercing scream of terror at the sight of this horrible monster.

"Now I've got to walk the log!" she thought. "It's death if I fall off!"

She watched the alligator a minute or two while she regained her self-control, and made sure that he was not moving. Then, with eyes straight ahead, she started to walk the log.

Once, toward the middle, she swayed, but it was only for a second. She straightened herself staunchly and marched on—to dry land.

Oh, the joy of feeling her feet on firm ground again! To know that whatever misfortune might come on the morrow, she was safe for that night at least! She could not drown, or be tortured by enemies; her only danger would come from snakes. She would take the precaution to explore her sleeping-place thoroughly before she lay down.

Weary as she was, she did not stop until she had gone farther into the island. The trees were denser here than they had been at Black Jack; it would be more difficult to land an autogiro, if by chance Susie should follow her. Nevertheless, she resolved to stay hidden as much as possible.

Away from the shore, she finally dropped to the ground and took off her wet shoes and stockings.

"Not that it will do me much good in the morning to start off dry," she thought bitterly. "But anyhow, I don't want to sleep in them." And then she removed her outer garments.

"Wouldn't supper taste good!" she said aloud, envying Susie that well-filled larder at the camp. But Linda knew that there was no danger of her starving so soon, after that big noon-day meal, and she put the thought of food from her mind. Water she could not forget so easily. After half an hour's thirst, she decided to risk a drink from the swamp. Had she but known that the water of the Okefenokee is not poisonous, she would have enjoyed her drink more. The "peat" gives it a queer taste, but it is harmless.

She was relieved, in her return to the water, to see that the alligator had gone—which way, she could not tell. Though she was desolately lonely in that vast abandoned wilderness, she did not care for the companionship of so ugly a beast!

When she returned to the spot which she had selected for her camp, she took her knife from its wet case and cut a few stout sticks from a

tree. With these she would explore the ground before she lay down, and keep them at her side while she slept, as some sort of protection from snakes.

As with the water, however, Linda's fears regarding snakes proved unnecessary, for the report of a large number of these in the Okefenokee Swamp had been proved by hunters to have been exaggerated. As a matter of fact, Linda did not see one during her entire visit to the swamp.

She waited until the daylight had faded, and darkness completely enveloped the landscape before she lay down to rest. The stars were still visible here and there through the trees, and, as upon the occasion of her lonely flight to Paris, they somehow seemed friendly. After an hour or so, she slipped off to sleep.

Only once during that strange, desolate night did she awaken, and that was when something cold and wet suddenly touched her face. She started up fearfully, seizing a stick with one hand and her knife with the other, squinting her eyes for snakes. Her flash-light had of course been thrown away during her swim, so

she could not immediately identify the enemy that had awakened her.

She laughed out loud when she finally saw what it was. She had rolled over against her shoes, which were still cold and clammy with water!

She went back to sleep again, and did not awaken until the sun was well up in the sky. She had no way of telling the exact time, for her watch refused to go after its bath in the swamp, but Linda judged from the sun that it must be nine o'clock at least. Her clothing was dry, at any rate, and her shoes only a little damp. But what a sight she was, she thought, after that long swim!

She went down to the water's edge to wash, and to drink the water that must serve as her breakfast, and looked carefully about her—into the sky, and on the water—for the sight of her enemies. For she had no doubt that as soon as the thieves returned, they would go in search of her, believing that she could not have gotten far away.

She was relieved to see nothing, no sign of human beings anywhere, and she paused to

watch some wild birds fly past overhead. Everything was peaceful and quiet—like a Sunday morning in the country. It was hard to believe that wickedness existed in such a beautiful world.

Then, abruptly, she noticed the soft swish of water not far away from her, and she looked up quickly, expecting to see the alligator again. In that awful second, her worst fears were realized. A canoe, with two men aboard, was coming straight towards her. The thieves! They had sighted her—they were wildly waving their arms.

It was too late to hide!

Chapter VI

The Enemy in the Autogiro

Defeated, miserable, hopeless, Linda sank to the ground and buried her face in her hands, waiting for the dreaded approach of her enemies. Oh, the cruelty of fate, to deliver her to them again, after her superhuman effort to escape! Bitter tears rushed to her eyes, scalding her face, and she sat as one expecting death, listening to the rhythmic dip of the paddles, as the canoe came closer and closer.

She kept her face hidden until the sound ceased, informing her thereby that the craft had stopped at her side. Tensely she waited for the harsh snarl of her captor's voice. But to her incredulous amazement, she heard instead the soft, deep, well-bred tones of a Southerner!

"Can we be of any help to you, Miss?" inquired the speaker.

Linda looked up instantly into the kind eyes of two exceedingly attractive young men.

"Oh! Please!" she gasped, the tears still running from her eyes. "Yes, please!"

And then, for the first time in her life, Linda Carlton fainted.

When she came to, she was lying on the ground, with two strangers bending over her, one offering her water, and the other hot coffee from a thermos bottle. A warm glow of happiness surged over her as she realized that she was among real human beings—not animals, or criminals. Though not naturally impulsive, she longed to throw her arms about these boys and weep with gratitude. If they had been girls, she would not have hesitated a moment.

Instead, she sat up and smiled her sweetest smile, so that, bedraggled as she was, she was still beautiful. The boys, man-like, each urged his particular offering upon her.

"Put that coffee down, Hal!" commanded the tall, fair youth at her right. "A lady who has just fainted doesn't want coffee."

"I do, though," Linda assured him. "I want water, and coffee—and anything else you have to eat. I fainted from hunger as much as from anything else."

The boy called "Hal" looked pleased at her

acceptance of his gift, and he hurried back to the canoe for some food.

"Are you alone?" asked the other, who remained at Linda's side. "And how do you happen to be here?"

"It's a long story," replied the girl, wondering just how much of it she had better tell. It was all so incredulous, that perhaps they wouldn't believe her if she did tell them.

"First have some food," suggested the boy who had gone to the canoe. "How long has it been since you ate?"

"Only yesterday noon—and I even had some chocolate about six o'clock. But after that I waded and swam from Black Jack Island to this place—whatever it is."

"This is 'Billy's Island,' " the boys informed her. "Named after 'Billy Bowlegs,' the Indian who once lived here. . . . But, Great Guns!" exclaimed Hal, "that's five miles at least! Nobody ever tried to swim the Okefenokee Swamp before!"

"Well, it seemed like twenty-five," remarked Linda. "And I hope nobody ever has to try it again."

She did not go on with her story immediately,

for she was too busy eating bananas—one right after another. Nothing had ever tasted so good! Meanwhile, the boys introduced themselves as Hal—short for Harold—Perry, and Jackson Carter, both Juniors at the University of Florida.

"We're both on the archery team at college," Jackson explained. "And we take a little trip into the Okefenokee each summer, to try out our bows and arrows on the wild game here. We camp each night on one of the islands."

"Then you know the Swamp pretty well," remarked Linda, with relief. They would be able to take her back to civilization.

"The southern end of it—yes," replied Hal.

"Now tell us who you are," urged Jackson Carter, regarding Linda with silent admiration. There was no doubt about it, she certainly was an attractive girl.

Linda hesitated a moment, and determined not to mention her first name. She was tired of all the publicity and disaster which her ocean flight had brought her. Besides, these boys might think she was just posing as Linda Carlton, the famous aviatrix, in order to impress

them. She would tell them only her middle name, instead.

"I am Ann Carlton, from Ohio," she replied. "I was flying my new plane when I got lost over the swamp, and had to come down on the first dry land I saw, because my gas was running low, and I didn't know how far the water extended."

"Smashed your plane?" inquired Hal, evidently satisfied with the explanation.

"No. But unfortunately I fell among a gang of thieves, and they stole it, and tried to hold me prisoner on Black Jack Island. But yesterday I got away, as I told you."

Both boys gazed at Linda in admiration and wonder. What a plucky girl she must be!

"Thieves in the swamp!" repeated Hal. "Not Indians?—a lot of Indians used to live here, and they might have come back."

"No. White men—and one girl. Regular thieves, the kind that rob banks and jewelry stores."

"But what were they doing? Hiding from justice?"

"I don't think so," answered Linda. "Because I don't think anybody suspects them in

particular. They have a regular camp on Black Jack Island, and they bring whatever they steal there, and transfer it by air-plane to an island in the Atlantic Ocean, where it's picked up by another partner in a boat."

Jackson let out a whistle.

"Pretty slick, aren't they? But they'll get caught sometime."

"I sincerely hope so. Unfortunately, though, nobody could identify them as thieves, because they haven't been caught before."

"You could," remarked Hal.

"Yes, if I ever see them again. Do we have to pass Black Jack Island to get out of the swamp?"

"I'm afraid so—but we needn't go very close to it—it's some distance from the regular 'Gator Road' we always follow."

"'Gator Road'?" repeated Linda. "There aren't any roads in the swamp, are there?"

"They're water channels," Hal explained. "Short for alligator-roads."

Linda shuddered.

"I saw an alligator last night," she told them. "I hope we don't meet any more."

"You poor girl!" exclaimed Jackson. "It

seems to me you've had most every dreadful experience anybody could have in the last twenty-four hours!''

''But they're over now,'' laughed Linda, wondering what the boys would say if she told them the real account of the kidnaping.

Even now Jackson Carter was looking at her strangely. She seemed like such a nice girl—but what sort of family could she have come from, that would allow her to roam around the country unchaperoned and alone? He himself was of an old-fashioned Southern family, who regarded such independence in young women as mere boldness. Yet Linda Carlton seemed anything but ill-bred, or bold.

''Aren't your family worried about you, Miss Carlton?'' he inquired. ''So far away—in an air-plane?''

''They must be by now,'' she replied with a pang of distress. ''I had promised to wire them every day—and it's been three nights now since I could. My aunt probably is afraid I have been killed.''

''Your aunt?''

''Yes. My mother is dead, and my aunt has always taken care of me.''

"But she lets you do pretty much as you please I take it. You northern girls certainly are different."

"Well, not exactly." Linda could not explain without telling the whole story of her life, so she decided to let the matter pass. "Hadn't we better be pushing on, if we expect to get out of the swamp before dark?"

"Yes," replied Hal. "But don't set your heart on that, Miss Carlton. I don't know whether we can or not. But we'll get past Black Jack Island, and at least as far as Soldiers' Camp Island."

"Soldiers' Camp Island?" repeated Linda.

"Yes. The story goes that some Civil War soldiers deserted, and hid there. I don't know how true it is, but it certainly is a good place to hide."

"Don't I know!" sighed Linda.

They climbed into the canoe, putting Linda on some blankets in the center, and started upon their journey. For the first time since her visit to the swamp, Linda was at last able to enjoy its beauty. The thick ferns, the cypress trees growing in abundance, the pines and the water-lilies! What a difference a boat could make!

Yesterday she hated the rushes and the moss; today she found everything lovely.

Avoiding the island where the thieves were camped, the boys made a wide circle, and did not pass even in sight of it. With each mile of progress, Linda's spirits rose higher and higher, until finally she suggested that they sing. She just had to find some outlet for her joy and thanksgiving.

"It must be long after noon," remarked Jackson, as they finished a familiar college song. "Hadn't we better eat?"

"I see an island ahead—I think it's Soldiers' Camp," replied Hal. "Wouldn't it be nice to stop and make some coffee?"

"I'm hot enough without any fire or hot coffee," returned Jackson, wiping the perspiration from his face. "But I would like to stretch my legs."

"Let me do the cooking!" urged Linda, eagerly. "I'd love to prove some use to you, after all the trouble I've made."

"You haven't been any trouble!" protested Jackson, whose admiration for Linda had been growing by leaps and bounds, in spite of the fact that he could not wholly approve of her.

For the past three hours he had been sitting in the stern of the canoe, gazing at her lovely profile, listening to the charm of her soft voice. Yet he knew he had better not allow himself to care for this girl; she was just the type his mother disapproved of, and with Jackson Carter, his mother's wishes were supreme.

They pulled up to the island and unloaded the canoe. There were all sorts of supplies—bacon, canned beans, fruit, and biscuits, as well as tea, coffee, sugar and canned milk. Even a little folding stove to set over a fire, and a coffee-pot.

"What a perfectly delightful spot!" exclaimed Linda, as she walked some distance inland. "Look at these lovely little houses! Why, I could almost live in them myself!"

What she referred to were the clumps, here and there, of cypress trees and overgrowing vines and evergreens, which, as a matter of fact, the hunters often used to camp in during their visits to the swamp. They were very attractive indeed, and would afford complete privacy, Linda thought, if she were obliged to spend another night in the Okefenokee.

The boys made a fire on the edge of the water,

and Linda insisted that they go off for half an hour while she prepared the meal. She laughed and sang as she toasted the dry biscuits and the bacon, and boiled the coffee. What fun it was to picnic when you were among friends—even if they were very new ones!

When the boys came back, they each proudly displayed a wild goose, as proof of their ability with the bow and arrow. Then, like three happy, care-free school-children, they sat down to their meal, having forgotten all about the thieves for the time being.

The shock was all the more terrible, therefore, when they suddenly looked up into the sky and saw the autogiro overhead. Linda was the first to identify the plane, to guess what danger they were in. She stumbled to her feet, pulling Jackson with her, and just as she opened her mouth to tell them to flee with her into the depths of the island, a shot rang out from the autogiro, and a bullet whizzed past the little group, so innocently enjoying their picnic!

Chapter VII

The Smash-Up

The robbery which was so carefully planned by the gang of thieves who had kidnaped Linda Carlton, was highly successful. One of the largest banks in Jacksonville was entered just before closing time on the afternoon of June 23rd by four masked robbers, who calmly took thousands of dollars in cash and securities, and escaped to a waiting car, without being identified or caught.

By a secret route these men suddenly disappeared—whither, no one but Linda and Susie knew. By midnight they were back again in the swamp, and by dawn they had reached Black Jack Island.

Exhausted from their journey, three of the men dropped down on their cots and fell instantly asleep. The fourth—Susie's husband—stopped to look into his wife's tent.

Flashing the light inside, he peered through

the doorway. There was Susie, sleeping peacefully on her cot. But the other bed was empty! "Susie!" he yelled in alarm. "Where's Linda?"

The girl awakened abruptly, and sat up, blinking her eyes at the unexpected light. For a moment she could not think what he meant. Then she remembered her prisoner.

"She's gone," she replied. "Beat it this afternoon."

"How?" he demanded roughly, coming over and shaking her by the arm. Susie winced, and pulled herself free.

"You leave me alone!" she warned him. "How do I know how Linda got away? Could I run after her?"

"No, but you might 'ave watched her!" snarled Slats. "Didn't I tell you to?"

"Watching wouldn't keep her here," retorted Susie.

"Is her Bug still there?" he inquired.

"Yeah. I hobbled over and took a look myself."

"Oh, you did, did you?" Then, worn out and disappointed, Slats started to swear.

Susie sat still, regarding him with contempt.

How vulgar such language sounded, when you actually stopped and listened to it! She did not realize it at the time, but just the few hours which she had spent with Linda Carlton had given her a new view-point. Or rather, had brought back her training as a child, before she had "gone bad."

When the man's anger had spent itself in violent words, he began to wonder how on earth Linda could have escaped.

"No human being could get far in this here bog, without a boat or a plane!" he exclaimed. "She must be around here somewhere."

"Why don't you go look for her?" demanded Susie, with a sneer. She was beginning to be glad that Linda had gotten away.

Her husband turned on her savagely.

"Look a here, Susie, if you helped that kid to get away—!" He held up his fist threateningly. "I'll make you sorry! Give you a dose of the medicine I was saving for Linda!"

"What do you mean?" she demanded, trembling.

"This gun!" he replied.

"Well, I didn't," she hastened to assure him. "Linda slipped off when I wasn't watching.

. . . But do you mean you were going to shoot Linda?"

"Sure, you fool! That's what kidnapers always do. Bait the big fish till they get the cash, then kill the victim, and ship the corpse. If we sent Linda back alive, she'd have us in the Pen in no time. Our game'd be up."

Susie shivered; she had not realized that the men had any intention of going to that end. True, Slats had once killed a bank messenger, but Susie always excused him on the ground of self-defense. "Hard-boiled" as she was, the idea of shooting an innocent girl like Linda Carlton was too much for her to approve. She felt suddenly sick with the horror of it all.

Slats sat down for a moment on the empty cot, while he thought things over. Linda Carlton must not escape to tell the world of her experience and to give such accurate descriptions of the gang that they would have to be caught. Aside from the matter of the ransom which the kidnaping ought to bring them, they dared not let her go. The case called for immediate action.

"Can you fly that Bug, Susie?" he demanded, abruptly breaking the silence.

"I guess so," replied the girl. "They say they're easier than air-planes."

"O.K. Then we're off. Get dressed as quick as you can."

"But Slats," protested Susie, rubbing her injured ankle, "don't forget I've been hurt!"

"Rats!" was his unsympathetic reply. "Get busy. I'll be getting the gas, and some grub. We'll need coffee—and a lot of it."

Distasteful as the plan was, Susie could do nothing but obey. But she was feeling very miserable as she ate her breakfast, very sorry for the "poor, brave kid," as she called Linda, very resentful against her husband.

The latter helped her down to the autogiro and put her into the pilot's cock-pit, where she sat for some minutes examining the controls. The dawn had changed into daylight, and the swamp was beautiful in the early morning sunrise. But, like Linda Carlton, Susie did not even notice it.

Impatient at the delay, her husband demanded, "Got the idea how to run her?"

"Sure," she replied, listlessly. "Start her up and climb in. . . . Where do you want to go?"

"Circle all around—flying low, so that we can

spot the kid if she's here. If we don't see her in the water, we'll stop at some of the islands, and look there. She can't 'ave got out of this swamp."

"O.K.," agreed Susie.

Without much difficulty the girl ran the autogiro along the edge of the island until it rose into the air. It was easy enough to keep it flying; the test would come when she had to make a landing. But Susie decided never to worry about anything until the time came. Luck was usually with her; her only serious crash had been the one of two days previous, and, after all, there was a reason for that.

Slats, who spurned learning how to fly, because he considered his a master-mind, above such practical work, was, nevertheless, enjoying the ride. He congratulated himself upon his own cleverness in securing this new plane for the gang.

"Like her, Susie?" he shouted, through the speaking-tube.

The girl nodded, indifferently.

"You can have her!" he announced, proudly, as if he were giving her a costly present of his own purchasing.

Susie drew down the corners of her lips in scorn, but made no reply. Didn't he realize that she would never dare fly this autogiro where anyone could see her? That the police all over the country would be on the look-out for this very plane? She was understanding for the first time that money was not much use without freedom.

As she sat in the cock-pit, silently thinking things over, she made up her mind not to try to help Slats in his search. She would have to continue to guide the plane, of course, for she never for one moment forgot the pistol that her husband kept ready to enforce his orders with. But she would not attempt to spot Linda, nor would she inform him if she did happen by chance to see the girl. No; it would be better to let "the poor kid" die by natural causes in the swamp than for her to be killed by Slats in cold-blooded murder.

Over the trees and tropical plants of the swamp they continued to fly, until the sun rose directly overhead, and they knew that it was noon. All the while Slats kept his eyes glued to the ground, without any success. Not a sign of human life did he see. Movements in the

swamp—yes—snakes and birds, and even an alligator—but no girl! Yet he felt sure that even if Linda were hiding, she would come out at the sound of the plane, for by this time she would realize that escape was impossible. Driven by the pangs of hunger, she would have to surrender to her fate. But noon passed, and they found no trace of her.

Perhaps she was dead by this time, the man thought bitterly—killed by a snake, or drowned in the treacherous water! He would not mind that, if he could only find her dead body. Without it, without the assurance that she was not still at large, he dared not seek a reward. What a lot of money he would be losing!

"We'll land on an island, and have some grub," he shouted to his companion. "Fly south to 'Soldiers' Camp.' "

"O.K.," replied the girl, beginning to doubt her ability to make a landing. But she was afraid to disobey—and besides, they had to come down sometime.

After that things happened with a rapidity that must have startled the peaceful bird-life in the Okefenokee Swamp. Approaching the island, Susie and her husband spotted the care-

free picnic at the same moment, and the former made a sudden, sharp turn in the hope of hiding the sight from Slats. At the same instant, he took out his pistol and fired at the group—at Linda in particular—missing her only because of Susie's rapid change of the position of the plane.

The sharp angle had its effect upon the pilot; she lurched over, striking her injured ankle against the rudder, swerving the plane violently to the other side. Panic-stricken, she tried to right the plane, but she had not even throttled the engine down to a landing speed. The inevitable crash followed. With an impact that was frightful, the autogiro headed for a tree with relentless speed, struck it and bounced thirty feet into the air.

By some miracle Susie, crouched as she was in the cock-pit, was not thrown out, but her husband, who had not taken the precaution to wear a safety-belt, was bounced wildly into the air, and landed, face-downward, on a rock.

During all this excitement, Linda and her companions stood tensely rooted to the spot, the girl gripping Jackson Carter's hand as if he were her one support. As the crash came,

she dropped her head on his shoulder and moaned aloud, totally unconscious of the fact that the young man was still little more than a stranger to her.

A cry from Susie aroused her to the fact that the girl was still alive. Ignoring the man who had brought about the catastrophe by his hasty shot, all three young people rushed to Susie's aid.

The plane was only partially turned over; the rotor and the wheels were injured, and the nose smashed, but it did not look to Linda as if there had been any serious harm to the engine. Susie's head was cut, and two teeth were knocked out, but apparently no bones had been broken. Very carefully the boys lifted her from the cock-pit and laid her on the ground.

"I have a first-aid kit in the canoe," said Hal, immediately. "I'll get it and fix up this cut. It doesn't seem awfully deep."

"Does it hurt very much, Susie?" asked Linda, offering her a drink of water.

"Not as much as my ankle. And my poor mouth! Without these teeth! My looks are ruined!"

"No, they're not," answered Linda, com-

fortingly. "Any good dentist can fix you up so nobody will ever know the difference."

Still no one said anything about the man who was lying so silently on the rock a dozen yards away. It was Hal Perry, returning from the canoe, who made the announcement which they had all been secretly expecting.

"The man with the gun is dead," he said, quietly, not knowing how Susie would take the news.

"So he got his at last," muttered the latter, with a certain grim satisfaction. "Nobody—not even his widow—is goin' to shed a single tear!"

Chapter VIII

The Chief of Police

Half an hour after the accident, Susie expressed a desire to eat, and Linda hastened to supply her with food. While the girl ate her lunch, the little group discussed their plans.

"Is my bag still in the autogiro?" asked Linda, surveying the disreputable suit which she had worn for three days. What a relief it would be to get into clean clothing!

"It was when we left," replied Susie. "If it didn't bounce out when we crashed. . . . Linda," she added apologetically, "I'm awful sorry about your plane. I—I—didn't mean to crack it up."

"I know you didn't, Susie. I think it can be repaired, if we can get the new parts to this forsaken place. Probably we can—by airplane."

Jackson Carter, who had been only half listening to this conversation, interrupted by tell-

ing the girls that he and Hal would take care of the burying of the criminal. "Unless," he added, turning to Susie, "you would want to take the body back to your home?"

"We haven't any home," Susie admitted sadly. "And no friends, outside the gang. . . . No, it's better for him to lie here in this swamp —where he meant to plant Linda."

The implication was lost to the boys, who did not know the story of the kidnaping, and who thought of Linda as "Ann."

"Then first we'll help you get your bag out of the autogiro, Miss Carlton," offered Jackson. "You can go back into one of those little 'houses,' and change into clean clothing, if you want to, while we attend to the burying."

"Wait a minute," urged Linda. "I think we ought to decide what we'll do about tonight. We can't all four get into that canoe, so Susie and I had better stay here, hadn't we? You could wire my aunt for me, couldn't you?"

To Linda's amazement, before either of the boys had a chance to reply, Susie put in a protest.

"It ain't safe for you to be here an hour more than you have to," she said. "Don't forget

there's still three rough guys hot on your trail. . . . No, I'll stay alone, if you leave me some grub, and a blanket. You can come back for me when you bring somebody to fix your plane." This generous offer came as a complete surprise to Linda; she had not realized before that this girl had swung over to her side. What a splendid sign it was! Susie must have decided to cut free from these criminals, now that her husband was dead.

"That's great of you, Susie," replied Linda. "And you needn't worry that I'll ever tell the authorities anything bad about you! I was afraid I oughtn't to leave you alone—but if you really don't mind——"

The other girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I'll get along O.K. I'm used to being left by myself. But don't stay away too long."

The arrangements suited the boys perfectly, for they were anxious to be out of the swamp as soon as possible. With fast paddling, they ought to be able to reach a little town in Florida by dark, where they believed that they could hire an automobile to take them home.

Fifteen minutes later Linda stepped out from the enclosure, dressed in a pale blue voile—the

only dress she carried in her bag, for she had shipped her trunk to Atlanta, where she had expected to report for work. The wearing of clean clothing was a pleasure second only to that of using a comb and a tooth-brush. She felt like a different girl.

If she had seemed pretty to Jackson Carter before, in that disheveled green linen suit, she was radiantly beautiful now. Returning from his gruesome task, he stood still, lost in admiration.

Linda laughed at his amazement.

"Do I look like another girl?" she inquired.

"The same girl—glorified," he answered, with awe.

Having unloaded the canoe of its food and blankets, and assured themselves that Susie was able to hobble around with the aid of a stick, the three young people pushed off. It was only three o'clock; all these occurrences—the crash, the death of the criminal, his burial—had taken place in less than two hours!

For some time the boys paddled forward in silence, each of the three occupants of the canoe lost in his or her own thoughts. Hal was going over the exciting events of the last two hours;

Jackson was thinking of Linda—or "Ann"—Carlton, and wondering whether her hiding her head on his shoulder had meant that she cared for him. Linda's mind, however, was occupied with the immediate future—with the part she might play in assisting the police to catch those arch criminals who were still at large.

It was she who first broke the silence.

"What would be the nearest large city to this southern end of the swamp?" she inquired.

"Jacksonville, Florida," replied Hal, immediately. "That's where we both live."

"Then that's where I want to go," announced Linda. "Have they a good police department?"

"Best in the country," boasted Jackson. . . . "Miss Carlton," he added, "would you stay at our home while you are in the city?"

"I'd love to," agreed the girl immediately. All through the South, until she had lost her way in the Okefenokee, she had met with this same southern hospitality, and had found it charming.

Jackson Carter was overjoyed at her acceptance, yet he was a little fearful of the reception his mother would give to a girl who was so different from all his other friends. Surely,

however, the older woman must see how fine Miss Carlton was, and accept her for her own lovely charm.

The hours passed swiftly and the daylight was fast fading when the boys finally informed Linda that she was out of the swamp. With a prayer of thanksgiving, she gave it one last look, hardly able to believe her good fortune. Less than twenty-four hours ago, she had been miserably lost in its depths. Now she was free to live again in civilization, untortured by the fears that had held her in such terror for the last three days.

Leaving the canoe in a boat-house on the bank of the small stream which they had been following out of the swamp, they walked to the nearest village and asked for the Post Office. Here Linda made arrangements to send a wire to her aunt, in which, however, she did not mention the fact that she had been kidnaped.

"Have been lost in Okefenokee Swamp," she wrote. "But not hurt. Wire me at Jacksonville, Fla. Love—Linda."

Her next move was to send for her trunk from Atlanta, and to wire for new parts for the autogiro, and while the boys looked up a place to

eat supper, she bought a Jacksonville newspaper. She hoped there would be nothing in it about her, for she hated so much publicity.

The first item that struck her eye was the announcement of the Jacksonville Bank robbery. More than a hundred thousand dollars had been stolen—in cash and securities—by four masked bandits on the afternoon of June twenty-third, and still no trace of them had been found.

"That money must be at Black Jack Island," she thought, resolving to get this information to the police early the following day.

She had to go through the paper twice before she found her own name. It was only a tiny notice, among the aviation briefs, and copied from an Ohio paper—stating the fact that Linda Carlton, world-famous aviatrix, had not been heard from for three days, and asking that the air-ports of Georgia report any sight of her autogiro.

Linda breathed a sigh of relief, as she saw how inconspicuous this notice was. For some reason she did not want Jackson Carter or Hal Perry to connect her with the famous flyer, and

she longed above everything to keep the story of the kidnaping from her aunt's ears.

The boys came back with the information that they had found a place to eat, and took Linda to a little frame house where a widow ran a sort of restaurant. The cottage was run-down and out-of-repair, but everything inside was neat and clean, and the food, though plain, was excellent.

"How long will it take us to get to Jacksonville?" inquired Linda, as they finished the meal.

"Two or three hours," replied Hal. "Providing we have no mishaps. Why?"

Linda repressed a sigh. She was very tired, and longed intensely for sleep in a real bed. These last two nights in the swamp had taken their toll of her vitality.

"If only we had a plane!" she said.

"It wouldn't do me any good," remarked Jackson. "I've never been in one—and I've promised my grandmother I won't fly until I'm twenty-one."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," offered Linda, with genuine sympathy. Life without flying seemed a dreary thing to her.

The only car which the boys had been able to hire was a dilapidated Ford that looked as if it would hardly last the trip. But it proved to be better than its appearance; over the lovely hard roads of Florida it traveled comparatively smoothly. To Linda's amazement, she found when they reached Jacksonville that she had slept most of the way.

The short rest had freshened her considerably, and she suddenly decided to go to the Police Headquarters that night. It was her duty to report the crash of her plane, and the death of that criminal. She wished that she had thought to ask Susie his real name—she was going to feel rather silly calling him "Slats."

With this purpose in mind, she asked Jackson what time it was.

"Half-past nine," was his reply. "Why?"

"Because I think I ought to report to the Police tonight about those thieves. I understand that it was a bank in Jacksonville that they robbed."

"Which bank?" demanded the boy, excitedly.

" 'The First National,' the paper says."

At this information, Jackson Carter dropped back in his seat and groaned. His mother's bank

—where all of her money was kept! The bank of which his uncle was president! This was going to mean trouble to the whole Carter family.

"Will you please take my bag to your house, and leave the address with me?" asked Linda, not knowing what Jackson was suffering. "I'll take a taxi out to your home, after I see the Chief of Police."

"Yes, yes, of course," agreed the young man, still absorbed in his own thoughts.

It was a late hour to visit the Chief of Police, but when Linda explained her reason to an officer at the City Hall, the latter sent for the chief immediately.

When Captain Magee came in a few minutes later, Linda was impressed with his appearance and delighted with his dignified and courteous manner. She smiled at him confidently; how different he was from those officers of the law with whom she had come in contact in Canada!

"I am going to tell you my whole story, if you will promise not to repeat the part about the kidnaping to the newspapers," she began. "I don't want my people at home to hear of that —for, after all, it is over now, and I am safe."

"Kidnaping!" repeated the officer. "You don't mean to say that you have been kidnaped?"

"Yes. My name is Linda Ann Carlton—I am the girl who flew the Atlantic in May." She blushed, for she hated to talk about herself, or to appear to boast about her own exploits, but this time it was necessary. "Here in Jacksonville, among friends, I am going to be known as Ann Carlton, because I want to avoid publicity." Her blue eyes became pleading, and she asked, in an almost child-like tone, "You won't tell on me, will you, Captain Magee?"

He smiled. "No, I won't tell. Unless it becomes necessary."

"Thank you so much! Well, to continue: I bought a new autogiro and flew down here to report to a company in Atlanta about a job spraying crops, and the newspapers printed the route of my flight. Early in the evening of June 22nd I lost my way over the Okefenokee Swamp, and finally landed on an island. A plane had been chasing me, as I later learned after it landed—or rather crashed—beside mine. The man in it held me at the point of a gun and compelled me to fly my autogiro to their camp

on Black Jack Island, where I was to be held for a ransom. *That man was the chief of the gang of bandits that robbed the Jacksonville bank.*"

She paused a moment for breath, and the Captain leaned forward eagerly. The story, which might have seemed incredulous to an ordinary person, was perfectly believable to him. He was used to the ways of criminals.

"But how did you get away?" he demanded.

"I never should have, if it hadn't been for this bank robbery," she explained. "While the men went off, I escaped, and was picked up by a couple of Jacksonville boys in a canoe."

Linda went on to relate the happenings of the afternoon, concluding with the death of the ring-leader of the gang, whom she knew only as "Slats." She spoke lightly of Susie, showing her merely as a weak pawn in her husband's hands.

The criminals' method of disposing of their stolen valuables was another interesting point in her story, and she told Captain Magee about the barren island in the ocean.

"Now whether this stuff is still on the island

or at the camp," she concluded, "I don't know. But I am ready to go and help you find out."

"You mean you are actually willing to go back into that swamp?" the officer asked. "To show us the way?"

"Of course! That's why I came to you tonight. So that we can make arrangements for tomorrow."

"But it may be very dangerous, Miss Carlton! These men will be armed, and will shoot at sight."

"I'll take a chance. Can we go tomorrow morning? By plane?"

"By air-plane?"

"Yes. Any other way would be too slow. They may have escaped already."

"But an air-plane will be so much noisier than a boat. They'll hear you coming."

"We'll have to take that chance." She stood up. "If you will get a plane, Captain Magee—a large one—I will fly it, to save space. Then we can take two or three armed guards."

"How do you know that you can fly any plane I happen to get, Miss Carlton?" he inquired, incredulously.

"You see, I'm a transport pilot," she explained. "We have to be able to manage most anything. . . . Can you send a car out for me to the Carters' home, early in the morning?" She handed the Captain the address.

"Yes. I'll telephone as soon as I can make all the arrangements," he agreed, seeing that he could not change her from her purpose.

Linda thanked him and hurried out to the waiting taxi. It was growing late, long after ten o'clock, and she was anxious to be in bed.

Jackson Carter himself came to the door when she rang the bell.

"Where is your mother?" she asked, immediately, for there was no sign of a hostess inside.

"She is ill," replied the young man. "The bad news about the bank—a great deal of our money was lost—knocked her terribly. She hasn't told grandmother, or it might kill her. So I had the maid get the guest room ready, and hope that you will excuse them both."

Linda nodded; she had no way of knowing that Mrs. Carter had protested about entertaining this girl whom Jackson had "picked up" on his canoe trip, and had stubbornly re-

fused to see her. The woman had worked herself into such a state of nerves over her losses and over this incident that she had actually made herself ill.

"I'm so sorry," said Linda, sympathetically. "If I weren't so tired, I'd go to a hotel, for this is no time for your mother to be bothered with a guest. But I'll just stay tonight, and leave early tomorrow. I'm flying to the swamp again with the police officers."

"Ann!" cried Jackson aghast, using her name unconsciously. "Don't, please! It's dangerous —you may be killed. . . . And, and, besides——"

"Besides, what?"

"Besides, it isn't done. You shouldn't go off to lonely places like that, without an older woman along."

Linda smiled.

"I can't be bothered with social codes at a time like this," she said. "I have to do all I can to get that money back. Think of the hundreds of people hurt by that bank robbery—if the bank is forced to close its doors! Including your own mother and grandmother! No, I just have to go."

"Let me go instead," he suggested.

"You wouldn't know just where the camp is. It's pretty well hidden, and I know the only spot where a landing is possible. Besides, you can't fly a plane."

"You mean you will pilot the plane yourself? Your autogiro's broken."

"Oh, it'll be another plane—a hired one. Now please don't argue any more, Mr. Carter—you sound like my aunt—and let me go to bed. And will you ask one of the servants to waken me at seven o'clock?"

"Good night, then, Miss Carlton," he said, almost sorrowfully, for it seemed like the end of what might have been a wonderful friendship for Jackson Carter.

Chapter IX

Two Prisoners

Linda's telephone call came early the following morning, and after a simple breakfast served by the cook, she left in the car which Captain Magee sent. Not one of the Carter family appeared at the meal, and there was no message of any kind. Linda, however, attributed this to Mrs. Carter's illness, and wrote a polite note of thanks to her hostess.

She found three plain-clothes men waiting for her at the police station, and they joined her in the car which then took them to the airport. A large cabin plane, capable of accommodating six persons, had been wheeled out on the run-way, awaiting their arrival and two service men were standing beside it.

"You are sure you can pilot her, Miss?" inquired one of these men, skeptically.

Linda opened her bag and took out her two

licenses—mechanic's and transport pilot's—and handed them to him.

"A mechanic!" he exclaimed, in amazement. "Gee whiz! Will wonders never cease? It's the first time I ever laid eyes on a lady-mechanic!"

Linda laughed.

"May I look the plane over before we start?" she asked. "And will you map out the quickest course to Okefenokee Swamp? I want to get into the southern part of it—Black Jack Island, if you know where that is."

With a grin the man disappeared to consult some one in the hangar, and Linda went ahead with the examination.

"There ought to be plenty of room in here to bring back any prisoners we may get," she said, cheerfully. "I think too, that you had better send for some food and water, Sergeant —for we can't tell how long we may be gone."

When she announced herself satisfied with the inspection, she and her three companions climbed into the cabin while the mechanic fired the engine. The plane taxied along the run-way and rose gracefully into the air, to the admiration of the three officers, none of whom could fly.

"You're there with the goods, Miss Carlton!" shouted the one named "Worth," who apparently was in charge of the expedition.

"Don't praise me too soon," returned Linda. "That was child's play. But wait till it comes to landing on that island in the swamp. There is only one spot big enough, in a plane like this."

"Well, we got plenty of gas," remarked Worth, cheerfully. "I'm not afraid. I'm enjoying the flight. It isn't every day that we go up in the skies on our job."

Linda was enjoying it, too. She flew carefully, watching her map, her instruments, and the landscape below. They flew over the island where they had left Susie, and Linda made a mental note of the location, in case she should be able to pick the girl up on the return trip.

It was difficult to keep her direction, for the swamp, covered as it was with grasses and trees, seemed like an unbroken, monotonous expanse from the air, but Linda had succeeded in spotting the little stream down which the boys had paddled the canoe, and she resolved to follow that to the place where they had picked her up.

After that it ought to be easy to locate Black Jack Island and the camp of the thieves.

But it was not as simple as she had hoped, even after she had located the island. Again and again she circled about, looking for a space large enough to make a landing. Finally she found what must be the edge of the island, for the water came up unevenly, but this beach appeared very small. It was one thing to bring the autogiro safely to earth in a place like this, and another to land a big plane.

When she had selected her spot, she determined to try "fish-tailing." She glided with considerable speed toward her field; as she approached it, she swung her air-plane from side to side, exposing the flat side of the plane's body to the air so as to kill the speed.

Her companions, who had no idea what she was doing, looked at Linda in alarm. Had she lost control of the plane, and were they about to be dashed to pieces?

But a glance at their pilot's calm, confident expression allayed their fears. This girl knew what she was doing! They need not be afraid.

Often at the ground school she had been com-

pelled to land on a given spot—such as a square of canvas; it was no wonder that she now felt sure of herself. A moment later she came down on the very mark that she had selected.

"Pretty neat!" exclaimed Worth, in admiration.

Linda turned off the engine and prepared to get out of the plane. But the Sergeant stopped her.

"You stay in here, Miss Carlton!" he ordered. "This is no place for a girl."

"But I have to show you where the camp is," she protested.

"Then show us from here! And remember, too, that you are our pilot. If anything happened to you, we couldn't get out of this swamp."

Linda saw the reasoning in this last argument, and agreed to remain inside of the cabin until she should be summoned. She sat there tensely, while the three men advanced cautiously towards the trees at the center of the island.

They had not gone more than a dozen yards when a shot rang out from behind a tree, and a bullet whizzed past over their heads. A cry

burst from Linda's lips, then an exclamation of relief at the assurance that her companions were unhurt.

"So they're still here!" she thought, excitedly, clasping her hands so tightly together that they grew numb with the pressure. "Oh, if the men only get them without being shot!"

The officers' pistols replied rapidly to the shot from the thieves, in such quick succession that Linda could almost imagine that she was in an actual war zone. But the volley lasted only a moment, for the thieves were short of bullets since "Slats' " disappearance, and before anyone was hurt, "Beefy" and "Jake" surrendered to Sergeant Worth.

Watching the whole proceeding from the window of the plane, Linda drew a deep sigh of relief. Then suddenly she remembered the third member of the gang—the man nick-named "Doc." Where was he? Hiding in the background, waiting to shoot them all down when they were off guard?

Cautiously, therefore, Linda leaned out of the side of the plane and called to Sergeant Worth to come back to her. Leaving the two thieves in charge of the other men, who instantly hand-

cuffed them, Worth returned to the air-plane, smiling over his easy victory.

With his assistance Linda jumped out of the cabin and whispered her warning into his ear. The man scowled in disappointment.

"This fellow may be waiting for you, Miss Carlton," he said. "You stay right here—behind the plane, while I go find out where he is."

Linda did as she was told, expecting every moment to hear renewed shooting.

"Where's your other man?" she heard Worth shout, as he approached the prisoners.

"Gone!" snarled Jake. "Two of 'em sneaked off. Double-crossed us, and took the kale!"

"Money? What money?" demanded Worth, instantly, hoping to surprise the man into a confession.

"Nothin'. None of your business," muttered Jake, seeing that he had made a mistake by saying too much.

"You needn't try to hide anything," remarked the officer, contemptuously. "We know all about the bank robbery—and other jobs, too—that you fellows can account for. You'll serve plenty of time!"

Impatient at the delay, Linda felt that she

had to be at the scene of action, to hear what had happened to the "Doc," who evidently was not on the island. She ran forward, just in time to hear Jake's explanation.

"One fellow made off with the girl in the plane yesterday morning," he said. "The other guy must have beat it later on in the day—while us two was still asleep. Took the boat and the cash. We ain't got nothin' here of any value—outside of food. . . . Huh! Why, if there ain't Linda herself!"

Angry as she was at this insolent manner of addressing her, Linda could not help smiling at the man's consternation. But she was terribly disappointed to learn that the money was gone. That meant that they had failed to accomplish the main purpose with which she had set out—to restore to the innocent bank depositors the savings which they had lost through no fault of their own.

"Perhaps the money's over on the island in the ocean," she suggested hopefully. "I had to help bury some boxes of jewels there while I was a prisoner—and those may still be there, too. Shall we fly over immediately, Sergeant Worth?"

"You know the way?" the latter inquired, in surprise. His admiration for this plucky girl was growing every minute.

"Oh, yes, I think so. We can make these men direct us if I forget. They are sure to know."

After a hasty search of Black Jack Island was completed—to make sure that the third man was not still in hiding—the party returned to the air-plane, and Linda made ready to take off once more. This was an exceedingly difficult feat, with a large plane, but the experienced aviatrix calculated everything before she made the attempt, and the air-plane left the ground at the exact time that she had planned. She directed it eastward now, out over the Georgia coast, on to the Atlantic. She remembered the course perfectly, spotting the identical island without any help from the prisoners, and landed on the wide barren beach without any difficulty.

Once they were out of the plane she recalled even the hiding-place, where "Slats" had placed the jewels, and she led the way through the underbrush. Unrolling the stone, and pushing the sand aside at her direction, the detectives brought out the three tin boxes which

Linda herself had been forced to help conceal.

Opening them up right there by twisting the locks, the officers gazed at their contents in speechless amazement. Two diamond necklaces, a string of real pearls, innumerable rings and pins and watches. And a bracelet of priceless emeralds!

"Whew!" exclaimed Sergeant Worth, the perspiration running down his face.

"The Van Tyn diamonds!" declared one of the detectives. "And these pearls solve the mystery of that robbery at the Kenworthy estate!"

"Yeah. And that big jewelry store in Atlanta!" added another, breathlessly. "Say, does this uncover a lot of money? I'll tell the world!"

"It'll mean a nice little reward for Miss Carlton," remarked Sergeant Worth, with a smile.

Linda shook her head.

"No, I don't want it," she said. "If there is any reward, it can be divided among you men. You faced the guns!"

"But Miss Carlton——"

Linda held up her hand. "I mean it," she said. "If you can't use it yourselves, perhaps your wives—or your children can."

"It would mean heaven to me," murmured

one of the detectives—a quiet man, who had scarcely spoken during the entire flight. "My child needs an operation——"

"Then it's settled," concluded Linda. Suddenly she glanced timidly at Sergeant Worth, almost as if she were about to ask a favor. "Could we eat, Sergeant?" she asked. "I'm so hungry."

"Why of course!" replied the latter. "I'm sorry, I'd forgotten all about lunch—but it must be way past noon. Griggs," he added to one of his men, "you go and unload that basket."

It was an oddly assorted group that sat down to that picnic lunch on the beach—the two thieves, the three police officers, and the slender, fair-haired girl in her linen flying suit. Linda could not help smiling to herself as she thought of what Jackson Carter's horror would be at her association with people like these. Yet how foolish he was! One look at Sergeant Worth's face, kindly as it was, assured her that she was well protected with him at her side.

She wished that she might stop at Soldiers' Camp Island on the return trip, but it was out of her way, and already the plane was loaded to its capacity. So she mapped her return trip in

a straight line back to the city of Jacksonville. Late that afternoon she landed at the air-port, where the group separated, the detectives and the prisoners taking one taxi to the police station, Linda taking another to a hotel.

It was only when she was quietly in her own room, with her bag unpacked, that she realized how tired she was. What a strain she had been through! How she longed for relaxation of some kind! If only she had Louise with her—or somebody else from Spring City!

She rested for an hour before dinner, but the thought of eating alone was not pleasant, with only a newspaper for her companion. She brightened, however, when the idea came to her to call her Aunt Emily on the long-distance wire. It would mean a great deal to hear that dear, familiar voice.

She did not have time after dinner to put in the call immediately, for just as she was leaving the dining-room, she was herself summoned to the telephone. Who could it be, she wondered. Nothing interesting, probably, for none of her friends knew where to get her. No doubt it was Captain Magee, congratulating her on the success of the afternoon.

To her surprise, it was Jackson Carter who said, "Hello!

"Can I drive in to the hotel to see you, Ann?" he asked.

"How is your mother, Mr. Carter?" she inquired, instead of answering his question.

"She's all right."

"Am I to meet her?"

The young man coughed in embarrassment. He would have liked to have kept the truth from her, but he could not lie to a girl like Linda Carlton, any more than he could lie to his mother.

"I guess I better tell you, Ann—mother's old-fashioned—and—she doesn't approve of you. She says I may not invite you out here again. I'm awfully sorry—I've tried to make her understand——"

"Please don't bother," interrupted Linda, coolly. "Perhaps it is better that an acquaintance like ours end as casually as it started. . . . Good-by, Mr. Carter. And thank you again for rescuing me."

"Ann! Ann! I can't let you go out of my life——"

But she had quietly replaced the receiver.

The tears came to her eyes, but she told her-

self that she was foolish. She would probably have to get used to things like this, if she meant to do a man's work in the world. It was worth it. Oh, the glorious feeling of power which she had experienced that morning when she stepped into that huge plane, and knew that she could control its flight! The satisfaction of conquering difficulties, solving problems, being of use to others as she had been today! Yes, it was worth all the snubs of every society woman in the United States!

For a moment she sat beside the telephone, waiting to get control of herself, when she suddenly heard a beloved voice behind her. Two voices—three voices—then two pairs of arms around her neck! Dot Crowley's and Louise Mackay's—and Ted was standing behind them!

"Oh!" she gasped, squeezing both girls at once. "Am I dreaming? It's too good to be true!"

"Are you O.K., darling?" demanded Louise, kissing her chum again and again. "When we read about your long flight south, and then heard nothing of you for three days, we got worried. So we managed to hop off."

"You angels!" cried Linda. "Oh, I might

have known you would! When everything looked blackest——"

"You mean about being lost in the Okefenokee Swamp?"

"Worse than that. . . . Let me call Aunt Emily, while you get a room, and I'll tell you the whole story after that. . . . But first tell me how long you can stay."

"Ted and I can only stay till tomorrow morning," replied Louise, "so long as you are all right. But Dot'll keep you company—she thought you might be lonely——"

"That isn't half of it!" interrupted Linda. "I was so lonely tonight that I couldn't eat. I just felt sick. Worse, far worse than my flight to France, because that was over quickly, and this just seemed to stretch out interminably."

"Now do call your Aunt," urged Dot. "She must be dying to hear from you—and we'll have you all evening. By the way, I'm rooming with you?"

"Nowhere else in the world!" exclaimed Linda, giving the girl an extra hug in her joy. "Room 420—and I'll be there in a minute!"

Chapter X

Susie Disappears

When Linda entered her hotel bed-room after the conversation with her Aunt Emily over the long-distance wire, she found two pleasant surprises awaiting her. The first of these that she saw was her trunk, sent on from Atlanta. The second was a telegram from the Pitcairn Autogiro Company.

Her new roommate, who was bending over her own suit-case, looked up expectantly.

"Good news, Linda?" she inquired.

"Splendid!" replied the other girl. "The parts for my 'Ladybug' have been shipped from Miami, where the company has some autogiros on exhibition. They'll be at the Jacksonville Airport tomorrow."

"Then your Ladybug is damaged?" asked Dot, who had heard nothing of the story as yet, beyond the bare facts that had been in the newspapers. All that she had read was that

Linda Carlton, famous aviatrix, who had been lost in the Okefenokee Swamp for several days, had turned up in Jacksonville, Florida.

"Yes, quite a smash-up," answered Linda. "But I wasn't in it. Another girl was flying——" She stopped abruptly. "Wait till Lou and Ted are with us, Dot, so I can tell the story all at once. I'm rather fed up with it myself. I'd loads rather hear what you've been doing at Spring City."

"O.K.," agreed her companion, cheerfully, and proceeded to report to Linda all the news that she could remember.

"What I can't understand," remarked Linda, a few minutes later, as she unpacked her trunk and took a flowered chiffon which she decided to wear, "is how everyone finds me at this hotel. I didn't know where I'd be staying when I sent those telegrams yesterday."

"I can answer that," replied Dot, immediately. "It's your friends at the City Hall. The Chief of Police there directed us. It was Ted's idea to go to him, for I never would have thought of it."

"Ted knows that Lou and I have a failing for police stations and Court Houses," laughed

Linda, recalling their experience in Canada the previous winter.

Five minutes later the girls joined the young Mackays on a cool upper porch of the hotel, where they were able to be by themselves. It was then that Linda told her story, first extracting a promise from the group never to mention the kidnaping episode to anyone else, lest the news get back to her Aunt Emily. The other girls listened in amazement, now and then interrupting with exclamations of horror at the outrage of it all. Ted sat grimly silent, more angry than anyone.

"And if you hadn't escaped, we probably shouldn't have gotten there in time," observed Louise. "To rescue you, I mean. Because of course they meant to kill you in the end."

"Did you realize that at the time?" asked Dot.

"Not exactly," replied Linda. "Though I really feared something much worse. I thought they would imprison me on that island in the ocean, and let me die of starvation. And I was horribly afraid of those men. I tried to keep with Susie until they went away."

"It was that bank robbery that saved your

life," remarked Louise. "And spelled ruin for them. If they hadn't been so greedy——"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Linda. "That's one reason why I feel it's my solemn duty to try to catch the fourth man, and get that money back. I'm really the only person who could identify him—except Susie."

"Do you honestly think she'll reform?" asked Dot.

"I hope so. If those new parts for the autogiro really come tomorrow, we'll fly over and get her, Dot."

"I'm crazy to see her," returned the latter. "And I'd enjoy going to the jail to see those two prisoners, and gloat over their punishment!"

"Dot's as vindictive as I am!" joked Louise. "Remember all the dark futures I used to wish for Bess Hulbert?"

"Poor Bess!" sighed Linda. "She certainly got hers——"

Thinking that the girls had heard enough of Linda's unpleasant experiences, Ted interrupted them by suggesting that they all go somewhere and have something to eat.

"If it's cool, I'm for it," agreed Louise,

jumping up and putting her hand through her husband's arm.

"You're not too tired, are you, Linda?" she inquired.

"Not a bit!" protested the girl. "I feel like a new person since you three arrived. . . . There's a lovely screened tea-garden across the street that looks awfully attractive. Shall we go there?"

Linda was right in her impression; the place was charming. Instead of the customary artificial flowers or tiny bouquets so often seen in restaurants, real rose-bushes showered their profusion of fragrance all about the edges of the screen garden. Surprisingly, every one was hungry; the three visitors because they had eaten only a light picnic supper, Linda because she had been too homesick to eat much alone. The food proved as delightful as the surroundings, and they all enjoyed it immensely.

While Dot was eating her ice, she noticed some people that she seemed to remember—sitting at a table in back of Linda. But she could not place them.

"Linda," she said softly, "see that young man over there at that table back of you—to

the right—with an older woman? Don't turn around now, he's staring at us. . . . He looks sort of familiar to me, and I'm positive I've seen that woman before. Do you know them, or are they people I have met at Palm Beach sometime, one of those winters when we went to Florida?"

Linda waited a moment, and then casually turned her head in the direction which Dot had indicated. The boy was Jackson Carter!

In relating her story of the rescue by the two boys in the canoe, Linda had not even mentioned their names, and had omitted entirely her visit to the Carter home. After her telephone conversation with Jackson this evening, she had decided to forget all about him.

She noticed that Dot was smiling and nodding.

"I remember her now," she explained. "A Mrs. Carter—she chummed a lot with mother at Palm Beach. And that's her son—he wasn't more than fourteen the last time I saw him. . . . I think I'll go over and speak to them." Linda flushed and tried to hide her embarrassment by talking to Louise and Ted about their flight. But Dot came back in a moment.

"I've got an invitation for us, Linda!" she announced. "Finish your lemon ice, and come over and meet the Carters. All of you!"

Linda hesitated. She did not know what to say. Evidently Jackson had not recognized her, or else was deliberately concealing the fact that he knew her.

"All right," agreed Louise, rising and pulling Ted by the hand, for her youthful husband was still shy about meeting the people whom he termed the "four hundred." But his manners were as good as anyone's, and Louise was always proud of him.

They stepped over to the table, Linda reluctantly following them.

"Mrs. Carter, I want you to meet Mrs. Mackay—our chaperon." Dot winked slyly at Louise. "And Miss Linda Carlton, the famous aviatrix! And Mr. Mackay. . . . And this is Mr. Carter."

The young people bowed in recognition of the introduction, but Jackson gave no sign that he had ever seen Linda before.

"Mrs. Carter says that so long as our chaperon is leaving tomorrow, we must come over and stay at her house, Linda," Dot said. "You

see, Mrs. Carter," she continued, turning to the older woman, "we're not so strict in the North about chaperons as you are here—but Linda's aunt would like to be. It really worries her to have her niece batting around alone in an air-plane."

Horribly embarrassed, her eyelids fluttering so that she could not see anybody distinctly, Linda tried to summon words to decline the invitation. It would be impossible for her to accept.

"We'd love to have you, girls," Mrs. Carter assured them. "For as long as you can stay. . . . How I would enjoy seeing your mother, Dorothy! You must tell me all about her."

"I'm awfully sorry," stammered Linda, still avoiding Jackson's eyes, "but I'm afraid we can't possibly make it. The fact is, I am expecting to get my autogiro tomorrow, and that will take us away from Jacksonville."

"Bring it out to our place!" urged the young man, with the deepest pleading in his tone. It was the first time that he had spoken, and everybody was surprised at his eagerness. That is, everybody except Linda—who had heard the

same pleading over the telephone a few hours before.

His mother smiled approvingly. She was glad to see that her son was interested in Dorothy Crowley, for the Crowleys were wealthy people, of unquestionable social position.

But, had she known it, Jackson did not even see Dot. He was lost in admiration of Linda—or Ann, as he thought of her. In her pale chiffon dress she looked absolutely ravishing. How could he ever have doubted that she was of good family?

"No, thank you ever so much, but we can't possibly," Linda repeated. "We—or rather I—have work to do. Of course if Dot wants to go——"

She looked at the other girl fearfully. How she would hate to lose her!

Dot's reply, however, was reassuring.

"No, Mrs. Carter, I must stick with Linda. It isn't often that my mother gives in and lets me go off like this, and I mean to take advantage of it. Besides, there's adventure ahead!"

Mrs. Carter sighed; these modern girls were beyond her comprehension. She was thankful that her only child was a boy.

While Dot was saying good-by, explaining that the Mackays had to be up early in the morning, Jackson managed a whisper to Linda.

"When can I see you, Ann? I just *must!*"

Linda smiled; she was in command of herself again. She had won in a difficult situation.

"Some time when we both winter at Palm Beach or Miami," she replied, lightly, as she nodded good-by to his mother.

The young man's interest in Linda had not escaped Dot's notice. When they had left the restaurant, she remarked, teasingly:

"You certainly made a hit, my dear. But I'm just as glad you turned down their invitation. The Carters have a marvelous home, I believe, but they're about 1890 vintage. They don't know that there was a War."

"Well, we really haven't any time to lose," was her companion's reply. "I'm almost afraid now that Susie will be gone when we get to that island. And I'm in a hurry to help the police trace that other thief with the money."

"Adventure is right!" laughed Dot, as the girls said good-by to Ted and Louise, and went to their room.

The Mackays left soon after dawn the follow-

ing morning, but Linda and Dot had decided to have a good sleep. They did not waken until after ten o'clock, when they heard the telephone ringing in their ears.

It was Dot who answered it.

"Oh, hello, Jackson!" she said, with a wink at Linda. "I used to call you by your first name, so I suppose I might as well now. How's everything?"

"Just fine," replied the young man. "And Dot—may I speak to Miss Carlton?"

"O.K.," answered the girl, holding the telephone towards Linda.

"Not awake yet!" yawned Linda, burying her head in the pillow.

"She says she's not awake yet," explained Dot, laughingly. "Better call later, Jackson—after we get some breakfast."

Replacing the telephone, she turned to her roommate.

"That big boy certainly fell for you, Linda!" she exclaimed, still unaware of the fact that Jackson had not met her for just the first time.

"Well, I didn't fall for him," the other stated, firmly. "And Dot, please, from now on I'm not at home when he calls."

Dot was surprised at this announcement; it was unlike Linda not to be friendly to everybody. Why had she taken such a dislike to a young man as handsome as Jackson Carter?

"May I ask you a personal question, Linda?" she inquired.

"Why certainly, Dot!"

"Are you engaged to Ralph Clavering—and is that why you're turning other men away?"

Linda laughed at the idea.

"No, Dot—I'm not engaged to anybody. And I don't want to be. I want to be free for a while. But not from my girl-friends!" she added hastily, reaching over and giving Dot a hug. "Oh, Dot, if I could ever tell you what it meant to me to have you three breeze in last night! Honestly, I was awfully low."

"It was Lou's idea," explained Dot. "I guess she thought you would be—so far away from everybody—even if you hadn't been in any difficulty."

"Lou's a peach," observed Linda.

They ordered a tray sent up to their room, and lingered lazily over their breakfast. Before they had finished the telephone rang again. This time it was the Jacksonville Airport, inform-

ing Linda that the new parts for her autogiro had arrived.

"I'll have to hurry!" she said to Dot. "I don't want to lose a minute now."

"Just what are your plans, Linda?" asked the other girl, as she, too, started to dress.

"Go to the airport and have the parts for the Ladybug put into a plane. Then fly to Soldiers' Camp Island, taking another mechanic along. I'll help this man fix the autogiro—collect Susie—and fly back here."

"You really believe you can fix it in one day?"

"Yes, of course. Why not?"

"Well," said Dot slowly, "I think if you don't mind, I'll stay here. You'll need all the space you can get in your plane to carry those parts to the wreck. And I'd be fearfully bored standing around while you work."

"I guess you're right," agreed Linda. "It would be better for me to take two men—a pilot and a mechanic. Because I can't fly this hired plane back again—I'll have to pilot the Ladybug."

"And you have to bring Susie too," Dot reminded her.

Linda lost no time in getting ready, and she was pleased to have left the hotel before Jackson Carter had a chance to telephone again. She found a "repair" plane waiting for her at the airport, and she made note of the new parts for the autogiro that were already packed into it. Two men were prepared to go with her—one a pilot, the other a mechanic. For once in her life Linda was to ride as a passenger.

The day was hot and dry, but over the swamp the air seemed cooler and fresher. The rainy season was late, everybody said; by this time of year the swamp was usually flooded.

As the plane flew over the desolate expanse, Linda smiled to herself at the familiarity of the landscape. She was getting to be an authority on the Okefenokee Swamp; she never need fear again being lost in its southern part, at least. Although the pilot had a reliable map, he found Linda's directions helpful, and before noon they came down on Soldiers' Camp Island.

The first thing that struck their notice was the autogiro, still leaning over on its side, looking pathetically helpless in its plight. But Susie was not in sight.

While the men unloaded their tools and the

new parts for the damaged plane, Linda went in search of the girl she had left there two days before. It was queer, she thought, that Susie had not come out to meet them at the sound of their motor. Was it possible that she was sick—or only asleep?

The island was a comparatively large one, several miles in length, and Linda decided immediately to explore it. Susie might be waiting somewhere within its depths, helpless or hurt, if she had fallen on her injured ankle. It would be necessary to make a thorough search.

Linda ran back to the autogiro to inquire whether the men needed her help, and explained what she was about to do.

"We don't need you yet, Miss," replied the mechanic. "Later on, when she's almost finished, you can help me look her over, and take her up for a test."

"By the way, Miss Carlton," put in the pilot, "did you think to bring any food for lunch? I only brought water."

Linda shook her head regretfully. How could she have been so stupid? Had her excitement over regaining her autogiro destroyed all her common sense?

"I'm awfully sorry," she said. "I just plain forgot! And I usually have some in the autogiro, but those thieves took it out. . . . Wait, though! There may be some on the island. We left a half a dozen cans with this girl."

A search of the little "houses" farther in on the island revealed what she had been hoping for—the remainder of the supplies the boys had left with Susie, consisting of two cans of baked beans, tea, coffee, sugar and canned milk. This ought to be enough for their lunch, and she ran back immediately to the men with the good news.

For the next two hours Linda searched the island diligently, calling Susie by name at frequent intervals. But no answer came in reply, and she found no trace of the girl. Susie had completely vanished.

Weary and hungry she returned to the shore of the island where the men were working, and was delighted at the progress they had made. The job was almost finished.

"I can't find the girl," she told them. "But I've collected enough fire-wood to cook our coffee and beans. We'll have our lunch in a little while."

Two hours later the autogiro was finished, ready for its flight back to Jacksonville. The engine was running smoothly; Linda climbed into the cock-pit and took it up in the air for a test flight. She found everything satisfactory; dipping low, she gave the others the signal to leave. With her Ladybug in the lead, the two planes made record time back to Jacksonville.

"She's as good as new," she told the mechanic joyfully, after both planes had landed, and she was paying her bill. "I wish I could fly her right over to my hotel."

"I believe you almost could," remarked the man, admiringly. "Land her at the front entrance, like a taxi-cab!"

"I'm afraid I'll have to take an ordinary cab," sighed Linda, spotting one out near the gate. "Thanks a lot—and good-by! I'm in a hurry to be back."

It was after six when Linda ascended the steps of her hotel, and found Dot waiting for her on the porch, trying in vain to keep cool.

"Where's Susie?" she demanded, immediately.

"Gone!" replied Linda. "I searched the whole island carefully—but not a sign of her!"

"Where could she go?" demanded Dot. "Do you 'spose some canoe picked her up—maybe those same boys that rescued you?"

Linda shook her head. Not those boys, any way! "What I'm afraid of is that the fourth man of the gang—the only one who escaped, you know—picked her up in his boat."

"Not so good—not so good," muttered her companion.

"No, it isn't. Just when I thought Susie had reformed, too—and cut free from those criminals!" Linda uttered a deep sigh.

"Well, let's forget her," suggested the other girl, cheerfully. "I've been waiting all afternoon to take you for a swim—so let's go, and have our dinner later. I understand there's a marvelous pool a couple of blocks away."

Linda's face brightened. What could possibly be better on such a hot day?

"Let's go!" she exclaimed. "Lead me to it."

After her disappointment at losing Susie, and her strenuous day in the heat, the relaxation of swimming in the lovely out-door pool was exactly what Linda needed. The water was cool and refreshing, and the surroundings charming.

For half an hour Linda swam lazily about, resting now and then on her back, occasionally mounting the board for a dive. At last she felt that she had had enough, and seated herself on the edge of the pool, dangling her feet in the water, and watching Dot perform all sorts of fancy dives, for the other girl was a real champion.

"What a marvelous girl Dot is," Linda was thinking, when she was suddenly startled by the sound of a masculine voice, almost in her very ear.

"Ann! Think of finding you here!"

Linda squirmed a little, thinking that the man must have made a mistake in thinking she was some other girl. For the time being, she forgot all about her middle name.

"Miss Carlton," insisted the voice.

Turning about, she saw Jackson behind her.

"How do you do?" she said, coolly.

The young man became embarrassed at her manner. He did not know what to say.

"Miss Crowley is a marvelous diver," he muttered, though it wasn't that that he wanted to talk about.

"Yes, I think so," agreed Linda.

There was a silence. The girl made no effort to be entertaining.

"You really are the girl who flew across the ocean alone, and won that big prize?" he persisted.

"Yes." Linda made a half-hearted gesture to repress a yawn. Jackson Carter needn't think he could buy her favor by flattery!

"But why didn't you tell Hal and me that, when we found you in the swamp?"

"It had no particular bearing on the subject, that I could see."

"If my mother had known that——"

"If your mother didn't wish to receive me at her home," interrupted Linda, "there was no reason in the world why she should. Everyone has a right to her own opinion!"

"But now that we've been formally introduced, it's different," he urged. "Please tell me how long you'll be in Jacksonville."

"We're leaving tomorrow," she said, rising. "And will you please excuse me—as I see Dot going to the dressing-room?"

Chapter XI

The Island in the Ocean

"I CERTAINLY am sorry we don't have Susie with us," remarked Dot, as the girls sat down to their late dinner that evening, after their refreshing swim. "I thought she'd be better than a 'talkie' for amusement."

"Yes, you would have enjoyed her, Dot," agreed Linda, picking up the menu and studying it with a great deal of interest. "I'm going to order everything here, Dot. I'm simply starved."

"So am I, though I ought to be ashamed to admit it. You should have seen the lunch I ate!"

"And you should have seen my lunch!" returned Linda. "We forgot to carry anything, but fortunately Susie had left beans and coffee on the island."

"Is that all you had?"

Linda nodded, and gave her order to the waiter.

"I'd certainly like to know where Susie is

now," she remarked, after she had satisfied the sharpest pangs of hunger with an iced fruit-cup.

"Yes, so would I," agreed Dot. "Her disappearance will make it a lot harder to trace that other thief. . . . Do you really expect to do anything about hunting him, Linda?"

"Indeed I do! Tomorrow's only the twenty-seventh, and I don't have to report to Atlanta until July first. I'm going to use those four days."

"But what could you possibly do?" inquired Dot. "How would you know where to go—without even a suggestion from Susie?"

"I have a theory," explained the other girl. "Wait till I eat some of this beef-steak, and I'll tell you about it."

"I'm crazy to hear it, because I'll be with you all the time. Mother said I must start back home the first of July—the day you go to Atlanta. I have my ticket bought."

For a few moments Linda ate her dinner in silence, enjoying every mouthful as only a hungry person can. Then, lowering her voice so that there was no danger of being overheard, she told her chum her plan.

"I've thought it all out," she began. "This is what must have happened: That thief—the 'Doc,' as the gang called him—took the boat and the money the day after the bank robbery, when he woke up and found that Susie and her husband had flown away in the autogiro, and the other two were still asleep. His idea was to get out of the swamp to the St. Mary's or some other river, that would take him to the ocean."

"And get on a steamer?" demanded Dot. "But Linda, if he did that, he's out of the country by now."

"I'm not so sure of that. A canoe trip like that would take a good while—the Okefenokee is fifty miles at least from the coast. And he'd be afraid to take a train—or an automobile, for fear of being seen. Besides, I don't think he'd take a steamer right away. He'd want to go to that island first."

"In his canoe?" inquired the other, skeptically.

"No, of course not. He'd hire a motor-boat—or steal one."

"I still don't understand why he'd want to get to that island," remarked Dot.

"For two reasons," explained Linda. "One because he expected to pick up those jewels—which we have already taken away—and the other reason is that the gang has arrangements with some party that owns a steamer, to stop at the island on certain specified dates. That would be his way of getting out of the country."

"It does sound plausible," admitted Dot. "What a brain you have, Linda!"

"Not a bit of that, Dot! It's only that I've been so closely associated with these criminals that I'm beginning to see their motives."

"And where does Susie come into all this?"

"The man must have seen her on Soldiers' Camp Island, from his canoe. Or rather, he saw the wrecked autogiro, and knew she must be there."

"And forced her to go with him?"

"Probably. He didn't want to take any chances, leaving her free to help the police."

Linda paused for a moment to eat the salad with which she had been served, and glanced about the dining-room. No one seemed to know her, or notice her—for that she was sincerely thankful.

It was not until they had finished their dinner

and found a cool, secluded spot on the veranda, that she went on with her plan.

"What I mean to do," she said quietly, "is to fly back to the camp on Black Jack Island early tomorrow. Not that I expect to find anyone there—but merely to get my direction—to go on to that island in the ocean. I don't know its name, so I couldn't look it up on the map."

"You really expect to catch those two on that island?" asked Dot, excitedly. "Will you take the police along?"

"No! I don't want to tell them a word about all this, except to say that I am going scouting about the country, and to ask for a couple of revolvers. . . . And, in answer to your first question, I don't really expect to find Susie and the 'Doc' there yet. But I believe they'll be along soon."

"And we wait for them there?"

"Yes. Take them unawares. Susie will probably be on our side, and we can plan something with her. . . . Of course this is all only theory. Maybe there isn't a thing in it. That gang was slick; they seemed to know how to drop right off the face of the earth. And I believe this man may be the cleverest of them all. He was quiet;

it's the boasting kind, like Susie's husband, who usually get caught first. . . . So you can see why I don't want any of the police along."

"We better take plenty of food, though," remarked Dot.

"We will take some—but don't forget that we can easily fly back to the coast each night. The island is only a few miles out—it's nothing in a plane."

"True," admitted the other.

"And we'll keep our room here at the hotel, for we want some place as headquarters. We'll put a few over-night necessities into my bag."

"O.K. I'll order a roast chicken and a chocolate cake from the dining-room tonight."

"Oranges, too," added Linda. "They always taste so good. I mustn't forget to fill my thermos-bottles, either."

They went to bed early that night, in order to get a good start on the following morning. Dot, who was particularly enthusiastic about the chocolate cake, carried the basket of food, while Linda took the handbag. They arrived at the City Hall immediately after breakfast, and were ushered right into Captain Magee's office.

"No news of the fourth man yet," he said,

after he had greeted Linda and been introduced to Dot. "But I've sent out a call for him by radio, so that all ships are to be warned to be on the look-out for a fellow of his description."

"There's something else I want to tell you," added Linda, "that may help to spot him. There is probably a girl with him." Then, rather reluctantly, she told what she knew of Susie, begging the Captain not to punish her too severely if she were found.

"And now," she concluded, "Miss Crowley and I want to do a little scouting ourselves—in the autogiro—and I want to know whether you will lend us a couple of .38s for the undertaking."

The Captain smiled whimsically. What an unusual girl Linda Carlton was! No wonder she had done things no other girl had even tried.

"Of course I will," he said. "Though such a request is rather out of the ordinary——"

"This is an extraordinary occasion," remarked Linda.

"Don't you want a detective to go with you?" he asked.

"No, thank you, we haven't room in the autogiro. Besides, we don't want to waste his time—for it may be only a wild goose chase. But if you will lend us a couple of revolvers, I think we shall be safe."

"Can you shoot?"

"If it is necessary. But I don't think it will be. The girl got to be very friendly with me, after her husband was killed. If I had only gotten to her in time, I think I could have saved her. As it is, she may not have joined the man of her own free will. You see she had been hurt, and was partially helpless. So he could do most anything he liked with her, if he had her alone."

"Well, good luck to you!" said the Captain. "I certainly take off my hat to a plucky pair of girls."

When Linda and Dot arrived at the airport they found the Ladybug in readiness for its second flight into the swamp. Linda inspected her, and piled in the equipment.

"I feel as if the Okefenokee Swamp were my home," she remarked, as she headed the autogiro in that direction. "I could almost fly it blind!"

"Don't!" warned Dot. "Your friend the Doc is still at large, and he may be watching for us with a gun."

This was Dot's first view of the swamp, and as they approached it, she was amazed at the vast expanse of it, stretching out in every direction.

"It's huge, isn't it?" she shouted to Linda, through the speaking-tube.

"Forty miles long and thirty wide," was the reply. "But we see only the southern end of it."

Conversation was difficult, so the girls gave it up until they came to Black Jack Island, where Linda had been held a prisoner.

"Shall we get out?" she asked her companion. "Or go straight on to the ocean?"

"Let's get out," replied Dot. "They might possibly be here, you know. Besides, I'm crazy to see their camp."

Linda brought the autogiro to earth and the girls climbed out cautiously, their revolvers in readiness, lest the enemy appear. But there was no human sound—nothing but the birds and the insects.

"Watch out for snakes, Dot!" warned Linda.

"I'd almost rather meet the Doc than a snake, I believe."

They walked carefully towards the camp only to find it absolutely deserted.

"Let's look all around," suggested Linda, who remembered everything only too well. "We'll begin with the mess-tent."

Quietly at first, they snooped around, peering into boxes of provisions, looking under the cots, behind the tents, and, when they were quite sure that they were alone, they began to act more natural, to laugh and joke with each other.

Linda showed Dot the tent which she had shared with Susie that one night of her captivity, and they both smiled over the sight of the magazine which had led to Linda's escape.

"We could even stay here all night if we had to," Dot remarked. "Seems comfortable enough."

Linda shuddered.

"Never again!" she protested. "But we may as well eat some lunch before we fly to that island. I'm hungry."

"And thirsty. But it isn't so hot here as it was in Jacksonville."

"No. And the island out in the ocean ought

to be cooler yet. You may like it so well that you'll want to spend the summer there. Only it has no tents or cots, like this camp."

"Thank you, I'd rather not play Robinson Crusoe," replied Dot.

"Poor man!" sighed Linda. "If he'd only had an air-plane, how simple it would have been for him."

They ate their lunch, and then, for the third time, Linda flew across the Okefenokee and over the coastal plain of Georgia—out to the barren island in the ocean where the treasure had been hidden. The desolate loneliness of the spot impressed her companion.

"You suggested this as a summer resort!" she remarked, when they had landed. "Why, I don't even see a fishing-boat!"

"That's just the trouble," replied Linda. "The first time I flew here—with Susie's husband—I looked about desperately for somebody to shout to for help. And there wasn't a soul! Nothing but ocean and sky. . . . Do you have your revolver handy, Dot?"

"Yes. Right here. But I don't know much about shooting."

"I'm sure we shan't have to. I just want to explore. But 'be prepared' is our motto."

"I will be. I won't shoot you, either, Linda—you can count on me for that."

Climbing out of the autogiro they walked towards the center of the island where the sand was soft and the underbrush thick. Perhaps, thought Linda, there might be more hiding places than the one hole which she knew; it would be worth while to make a thorough search. On and on they plodded, the sand sinking into their shoes, the sun beating down upon them with full blast, for what trees there were, were not high enough to afford much shade. It was difficult to find the hiding place in such monotonous desolation, but at last she came to the spot.

"Somebody's been here since I came with the police!" she said to Dot, "because we left the stones as we found them. But it looks as if the hole is empty."

She was correct in her surmise. After five minutes of pushing the sand away, Linda had assured herself that nothing was there.

"Let's go down to the opposite shore from

the one we came in on," suggested Dot. "And explore that."

"All right," agreed Linda. "If you can stand walking through this sand again. . . ." She stopped abruptly, peering towards the shore. An instant later she dragged the other girl to the ground. "The Doc!" she whispered, hoarsely. "I saw him down by the water—maybe there's a boat coming!"

"What shall we do?" demanded Dot, clutching her revolver tightly.

"Wait till he gets on—and follow in the autogiro. I've got plenty of gas. . . . Let's be creeping back to the Ladybug."

The girls kept well hidden behind the underbrush, crawling along on their hands and knees. Suddenly Dot stopped; she had struck something solid. A canvas bag—two bags, stuffed full with something. Could it be the money?

Breathless, they both stopped while Linda untwisted with her pen-knife the coarse pieces of wire around the tops of the bags, and dumped out the contents. Money in an amount they had never seen before! Hundred dollar bills in rolls that they had no time to count, bonds in thousand-dollar denominations!

"Hide it quickly, Dot!" whispered Linda. "In your pockets, your riding-breeches—stuff some of it in my clothes—while I re-fill these bags with sand. . . . And have your revolver ready."

Chapter XII

The Money-Bags

Linda's theories regarding the fourth member of the gang of thieves had been only partially correct. As she had surmised, the "Doc" slipped off in the canoe from Black Jack Island while his companions slept, and he did stop at Soldiers' Camp. But it was not he who compelled Susie to go with him, but the girl herself who insisted upon accompanying him.

Susie's desire to reform had been sincere while Linda was with her. She had actually meant to cut free from the gang and go back to a normal mode of life—earning her living as she had done when she met her husband. No more sneaking about in fear of the law, no more hiding in that desolate camp in the Okefenokee Swamp! She would get a job at an airport, and take up flying again. She might even become famous—like Linda Carlton!

But unfortunately, after the famous aviatrix

left her alone, her enthusiasm faded, and her faith in her ability to make a "come-back" died as suddenly as it was born. How could she ever hope to be free from the stain of her last two years of living—since her marriage to "Slats"? If Linda did not turn her over to the police authorities, someone else would. She might have to serve five or ten years in prison.

As the afternoon passed, she grew more and more miserable, more anxious to get away. If only she had a boat! If her ankle were not so painful, and her bandaged head not so conspicuous! If there were only some way for her to escape!

Having no appetite, she made no pretense at preparing any supper for herself. There was still some cold tea left from lunch; she decided to make that her meal, and an hour later she fell asleep where she was, right on the shore of the island.

The sun was rising over the swamp when she awakened the following morning, and she sat up with difficulty, cramped by her uncomfortable position in sleep.

"I might as well be dead—with Slats," she

thought, morbidly, as she viewed the desolation around her. Again she tried to rise, when the soft sound of a paddle, dipping into the quiet water attracted her attention. She waited breathlessly. Were the boys coming back so soon?

Not long afterward a canoe came into sight. Susie's heart leaped with joy when she recognized who was guiding it. The Doc!

"Doc!" she cried. "Bill Rickers!" she added, using the man's real name. "It's Susie!"

The man pulled up to the island, amazed at finding her there. In the dawning light he saw the autogiro, lying half on its side.

"Where's Slats?" he demanded.

"Dead," answered the girl, immediately. "We had a wreck. . . . Will you take me with you?" she begged. "I'm almost crazy here all by myself."

"I wanted to make a get-away alone," he muttered.

"You have the money!" she cried, jumping at once to the correct conclusion. "Where are the other two men?"

"Asleep at Black Jack Island."

"And where are you going?"

"Out of the swamp—across the state, and then over to our island. The yacht's due there tomorrow—I want to be ready to go with it."

"O.K. with me," agreed Susie, as if she had been invited to go. "Let's push off now—or wait—we'll eat some breakfast. There's beans and cold tea."

"Maybe you could be some use," remarked the man, as he ate the meager breakfast. "If we could get a plane. And I am sorry for you, Kid—all alone here with Slats dead."

Susie gave him no chance to change his mind. Hobbling out to the little "house" where the boys had put the blanket and the extra food, she picked up the former, smoothed her dress and her hair, and returned to announce herself ready. They pushed off again, following the little stream out of the swamp.

"How do you expect to get across the state?" asked the girl, wearily, when late that afternoon, they brought their canoe to a landing. She had slept a little in the boat, but she was still very tired.

"Hitch-hike, I reckon," was the reply. "If we go hirin' any cars, somebody might get suspicious. Once at the coast, I count on rentin' a

little fishing-boat from some fellow—one big enough to take us to the island."

"I can't hitch-hike," objected Susie.

"Don't then,—stay here," answered the man, indifferently.

"You know I can't do that, either. Let's go to that house over there, and see if we can't get some supper. Maybe they have an old Ford or a team of horses."

"You foot the bill?" he asked, shrewdly. With all that money in his possession, this man had no intention of spending any of it on anyone but himself.

Susie considered a moment. She hadn't any money at all—she always got what she wanted from her husband. But she owned some costly jewelry.

"I'll give you this diamond," she offered, "if you get me safe out of the country. And no walkin'!"

"O.K.," he muttered, his greedy eyes gleaming at the sight of the beautiful jewel. "You win. Go ask the woman yourself."

It was thus, by strange coincidence, that Susie and the Doc rode across Georgia that evening in the same Ford that had driven Linda and the

boys to Jacksonville the night before. They reached a seaport town a little after midnight, and Susie succeeded in finding a house to stay in, though her companion preferred to remain out-doors, for he said he "didn't trust nobody." In the morning, when she joined him, he had rented an old motor-boat from a fisherman. "Rent" was the word he used, but he had not the slightest intention of returning it.

"You can run her, Susie," he said. "You're better at engines than I am, and she'll need coaxing. I'll steer."

It was a difficult cruise, for at times the engine coughed and died, and Susie had to try all sorts of methods to start her up again. When they finally came within sight of the island, the motor sputtered its last and refused to function any longer. The man managed to get the boat inshore by riding the waves, and using the oars kept at the bottom of the boat for just such an emergency.

About the time Linda Carlton and Dot Crowley were eating their lunch on Black Jack Island, Susie and the Doc were making their landing. They pulled in at the opposite shore from the one which the girls later used in the

autogiro. The man's first concern was with the hiding-place where he expected to find the boxes of jewels. His disappointment was keen when he discovered that they had been taken away.

"The cops has found us out!" he snarled angrily at Susie, as if it were her fault. "They'll be back again—I'll bet you! We gotta get out of here!"

"How?" demanded Susie. "Not in that boat?"

"Nope. Maybe the yacht will be along early, but it ain't likely. It usually runs after dark."

Dumping his bags in the sand not far from the hole, he tried to think what would be best to do.

"We gotta act quick, Susie—if the cops come. No use tryin' to put up a fight—with only one gun, and them two bags to guard. . . . You watch on that other shore, and I'll go back to the one we came in on. Whatever they come in—air-plane or boat—we gotta swipe. Hide if you see anything comin', give 'em a chance to get into the island—and grab their boat. Give me a signal——"

"How?" she interrupted.

"You take the gun, and shoot when you're

ready to push off. . . . If I see anybody on my side, I'll whistle, as near like a bird as I can." He grinned to himself; if the police came in anything but an air-plane, he wouldn't bother with Susie. Let her face the music!

"O.K. But I couldn't run, Doc. Don't forget that."

"I ain't forgettin'," he returned.

They separated, and for two hours waited tensely, keeping a sharp look-out for the rescuing yacht, hoping against hope that it would arrive before the police. But at three o'clock their worst fears were realized. Susie saw the autogiro coming towards them, and hobbled off into the depths of the island to conceal herself. Lying flat on the sand, she was not able to identify the people who got out of the plane, but she could see that they both wore riding-breeches, and she believed they were men. So she kept still until they had disappeared into the under-brush. Then she began to creep laboriously, in a round-about fashion, to the autogiro.

Susie's progress was slow; she did not reach the plane until after Linda and Dot had succeeded in emptying the bags of the money, and refilled them with sand. The girls had just

recognized the man on the shore, and were creeping farther into the island, out of sight of him, when the shot of the pistol rang out above the roar of the ocean. They had no way of knowing that Susie had fired it.

A moment later they heard the rustle and crackle of underbrush, as the man came towards them. From her hiding place, now some distance from the bags, Linda raised her head cautiously, and saw the thief retrieve the bags with a grab. Then he dashed back to the shore, circled the island on the harder sand, and reached the opposite shore, where the autogiro was standing.

"Why doesn't he come after us?" whispered Linda, in amazement.

"He will soon, I'm afraid," replied Dot hoarsely, clutching her revolver tightly. "But I'm going to shoot if he does!"

"So am I," answered Linda, calmly. "We've got the advantage—we're hidden."

Tensely they waited for five minutes—possibly ten; then something they had not thought of happened. The engine of the autogiro began to roar!

"They're stealing the Ladybug!" cried

Linda, aghast at such a calamity. "Susie must be with him! Dot, we can't let them do that!"

Regardless of the danger, Linda jumped up excitedly, and rushed to a clearing, where she had a view of the shore. She was just in time to see her beloved autogiro taxi along the beach and rise into the air.

Dot dashed to her side, and the two girls stood together in helpless agony of spirit.

"Prisoners!" cried Dot, at last, dropping her useless revolver into the sand.

"Robinson Crusoes!" added Linda, bitterly. "No better off! No plane!"

"With thousands of dollars!" groaned her companion, ironically. "Where money is no good at all!"

Chapter XIII

The Broken Motor-Boat

The two girls continued to stand perfectly still on the sand, gazing at the retreating autogiro, which apparently was flying out farther over the ocean, and circling about in a strange manner.

"Why don't they fly towards the coast—towards Georgia?" demanded Dot, in bewilderment.

Linda took her spy-glasses out of her pocket, and squinted through them at the plane.

"I see a boat!" she exclaimed. "It must be that yacht the gang had arrangements with—to pick up the stuff they steal. . . . Yes, and that's another island. . . . Look, Dot—see if I'm right."

The other girl took the glasses, and confirmed Linda's statement.

"Yes, it is. . . . And the Ladybug's landing on it. . . . Two people getting out—must be

Susie and the Doc—and boarding the boat. . . . Linda! They're leaving the plane on the island!"

It was true indeed; taking turns at the glasses, the girls watched the yacht push off into the ocean.

"And here we are—and there's the Lady-bug!" remarked Linda, grimly. "Just out of reach! The question is—how to get to her."

"Swim," suggested Dot.

"Maybe you could, Dot. But I'd be afraid of sharks."

"No, I don't think I'll try it either. Besides, the current's probably awfully strong."

"Oh, if Jackson and Hal would only rescue us now!" lamented Linda. "I wouldn't treat them a bit coolly."

The truth of that situation flashed upon Dot.

"Was it Jackson Carter who rescued you before, Linda?" she asked.

Linda blushed. "Yes—it was," she admitted.

"Then why did you treat him so cruelly? I should think you would have been everlastingly grateful."

"I was. Till his mother snubbed me—and he even doubted that I was a nice girl, just be-

cause I was traveling about alone. Then, when you introduced me, he wanted to be friends. Naturally I was hurt."

"I don't blame you! But Mrs. Carter is terribly old-fashioned."

While they were talking they had been slowly advancing towards the beach. Suddenly Linda spied a pile of articles near the spot where the autogiro had taken off.

"Look, Dot!" she cried. "There's our stuff on the shore! The basket! My over-night bag—and I guess that other box is my tool kit, that I always keep in the plane! Come on!"

Breathlessly they dashed down to the shore and found that their belongings had indeed been tossed out of the autogiro.

"This proves that Susie's our friend!" cried Linda, hopefully. "She must have done this."

"Fine friend—to steal the plane!" returned Dot. "She didn't have to go with that man!"

"Maybe not. . . . I'm afraid I can't understand her," mourned Linda. "Half good, and half bad——"

"Don't worry about Susie," urged her companion. "We have enough to think about for

ourselves. . . . Still, it is nice that we eat tonight. Aren't we lucky to have that food?"

Dot's forced cheerfulness brought their wretched plight back to Linda. How selfish she had been, to drag this other girl into this wretched business, when she came South to enjoy a holiday!

"Oh, Dot!" she wailed, "I can't tell you how sorry I am—about bringing you in on this! I had no right to let you come. Your mother will never forgive me. It was different with Lou. When she set out on those wild adventures with me, her parents knew what to expect."

"Cheer up, we're not dead yet," was the reassuring reply. "Things aren't so black. Our enemy is safely out of the country, I take it, and Captain Magee is sure to look us up soon, when he doesn't hear from us. Besides, a friendly boat may come along at any minute."

"Dot, you're one girl in a thousand!" cried Linda, giving her chum a hug. "You're just an old peach, not to be complaining. And for my own sake, I'm so thankful you're with me! Just imagine how I'd feel all alone!"

"Well, let's enjoy ourselves while the food

lasts. Let's carry it inshore farther, and find a camping place. You have matches in your pocket?"

"Always!" replied Linda, thinking of her experience in Canada, when she had lost her matches with her plane. "I keep my pockets as full as a man's now, so if I am separated from my plane, I'm not helpless."

"Wise girl! You're learning, Linda. In a year or two you can do exploring, like Byrd—if there are any places left to explore."

"I guess Aunt Emily will make me sit home with folded hands after this," remarked Linda, soberly. "If we aren't rescued soon, it will be bound to get into the newspapers."

She stooped over and opened her tool-box, in which she carried all sorts of things besides actual tools. A flash-light, a knife, wire and string, even nails and nuts. And down in the corner she found several cans of food, which she thought the bandits had taken out when they emptied the plane of its gas that first day in the swamp.

"This is going to be a big help," she said. "We might even build a boat——"

"Out of underbrush?" asked Dot, sarcasti-

cally. "Why, there isn't a decent tree on the whole island."

"I'm afraid you're right," sighed Linda. "Well, come on—let's get farther in, and take this money out of our clothing. Money can be a nuisance sometimes," she added, jokingly.

They picked up their possessions, Linda taking the tool-box, and Dot the bag and basket of food, and hunted the shadiest spot they could find for their camp. Then they set about diligently unloading the money, and stuffing it into the over-night bag, which they first emptied of its contents.

"Let's see what we have to keep us alive," suggested Dot, peering into the basket. "Three quarters of a chicken, ten oranges, almost a whole cake, four bananas, and eight rolls, besides that stuff you found. And one thermos bottle full of water—and another half full."

"It's the lack of water that's going to make it hardest," observed Linda. "If only the ocean weren't salty."

"Well, maybe we shan't even need all this! If we rig up some kind of signal of distress——"

"What shall we use? Clothing?"

"We might take hundred dollar bills," laughed Dot. "They're the most worthless things we have now."

"True. Only think how glad the people will be to get them back. Mrs. Carter, for instance. . . . I have it!" exclaimed Linda, brightly. "Our pajamas! Lucky we put them into the bag! We won't need them in the day-time, and no boat could see a signal at night anyway."

"Good idea!" approved her chum. "Now let's leave all this stuff here, and explore the island. We might find something—and anyhow, it will give us something to do."

Arm in arm they returned to the beach, where the sand was harder, and began to circle the island. They had gone half way around—to the opposite shore—when they both spied the old motor boat at the same moment. So great was their joy that they jumped up and down, hugging each other wildly.

"Of course that's what the man came in!" cried Linda. "We might have known he and Susie couldn't swim the ocean!"

They started to race to the boat, and arrived together. Dot immediately set about examining

it for leaks, while Linda gave her attention to the engine.

"It's broken," she said. "But I'm sure I can fix it. You know how I love to take motors apart. Just give me a day——"

"Darling, you can have a week if you want!" agreed Dot, wild with happiness and relief. "We can make our food last."

"A day or maybe two ought to be enough. Then we can get to that other island and retrieve the Ladybug, before anybody even misses us!"

"It seems to be pretty sound," said Dot. "No leaks, or anything. And there are even a couple of oars in the bottom, if the engine won't go."

"Oars wouldn't take us far, with such a heavy boat. But I'm sure I can fix the motor, and there's a can of gasoline here, besides what's in the tank. . . . But I don't believe I better start now—I'd just get it apart, and the daylight would be gone. I'll get up early tomorrow. . . ."

"Suits me," agreed the other. "Now let's go back to our camp and fix some supper."

Both girls felt exceedingly cheerful as they

collected sticks and lighted a fire. From one of Linda's cans they took out tea, but the rest they left unopened. The beans and jam and biscuits would keep until after the picnic food was gone.

"I have a bright idea," remarked Dot, as she ate a leg of chicken. "Why couldn't we make chicken soup, out of the bones and sea-water? You have to put salt in it anyway, don't you?"

"Yes, but I'm afraid it would be too salty. It would make us so thirsty we'd want to drink all our water at once. . . . Still, we might try. We wouldn't be wasting anything."

"Too bad we haven't sore throats," said Dot, still in a mood for joking.

"Sore throats!" repeated Linda, in amazement. "What's the connection between chicken soup and sore throats?"

"Nothing—I was only trying to think up ways to use salt water. We always have to gargle with salt water, at home, when we have sore throats. Doesn't your Aunt Emily make you do that?"

Her companion laughed. "No, we always use Listerine. But it's an idea. Think up some more, Dot—we'll get some uses for it yet!"

They drank very sparingly of the water in the thermos bottle—one cup apiece—and decided to limit themselves to that at each meal. Sometimes they would substitute oranges—how thankful they were that they had brought so many!

Their light-heartedness diminished as the sun went down and darkness settled over the island. The loneliness of the night, the solemn roar of the ocean, the isolation of the island, appalled them. Not a human being except themselves—not a human sound!

But they had each other, and this comfort was so overwhelming to Linda, that it shut out all her other troubles. She could not help exulting every few minutes over the joy of having a companion, and Dot was thankful that she was there, so long as Linda had to meet with such a fate. Yes, surely, they would make the best of things.

They slept well that night, for the sand, covered with leaves the girls had plucked, made a soft bed. A breeze from the ocean was so cooling that Linda had to pull their slickers over them as a covering. The stars shone in a

friendly sky; hand in hand, as Linda and Lou had so often slept, the two girls dropped off into unconsciousness.

Their first thought upon awakening, after remembering where they were, was the autogiro. Their second was the motor-boat. They could not eat any breakfast until they had made sure that both of these were still safe.

"That island doesn't look very far away, does it?" Dot remarked, after they had satisfied themselves upon these two questions.

"No, it doesn't," agreed Linda, taking out her spy-glasses. "Only, you can't tell by appearances—they're so deceiving on the ocean."

They went back to their camp and breakfasted on oranges and rolls, finishing off with chocolate cake.

"Because we might as well enjoy it while it is fresh," Dot said laughingly. Neither girl ever had to worry about indigestion.

All day long Linda worked on the engine, with her companion at her side, watching her in admiration. All that day and the next. On the evening of the twenty-ninth of June she announced that she was finished. The engine was condescending to run!

"Tomorrow we get the Ladybug!" Linda announced, exultantly. "And get back to Jacksonville in time to keep our engagements for July first!"

They were very happy as they sat beside their camp fire that night, eating their supper of baked beans and crackers and oranges. Happy and light-hearted, never thinking to glance at the sky, and to guess the meaning of the dark clouds that were gathering. Had they only done so, they might have gone to the autogiro that night in their repaired motor-boat—and saved their relatives and friends all the anguish and anxiety that they were to experience during the coming days.

But neither Linda nor Dot gave the weather a thought; they went to sleep that night in the joyful expectation of returning to Jacksonville the following day.

At dawn the storm came, pouring down upon them in torrents, arousing the ocean to terrifying waves, shutting out the sight of the island where the autogiro was waiting—imprisoning the girls once more in their desolate loneliness. And now practically all of their food was gone!

Chapter XIV

Searching Parties

When Linda Carlton and Dorothy Crowley left Jacksonville Airport on the morning of June twenty-seventh in the Ladybug, and flew into the Okefenokee Swamp, they fully expected to telephone to their families that night, or at least to send a wire to them, as they had promised. So when Miss Emily Carlton heard nothing from her niece she became anxious, and directed her chauffeur to drive her to Mrs. Crowley's cottage.

Both women were established at Green Falls for the summer, which was the favorite resort of all Linda's friends from Spring City. It was there that the girl had called her aunt from Jacksonville, the night that Dot and the Mackays had arrived. Only one telegram had she received since that time.

Mrs. Crowley, who was less inclined to be nervous than Miss Carlton, tried to reassure the

latter, saying that she realized how busy the girls would be. But when June twenty-eighth passed without any word from them, she too became alarmed, and together the two women put in a long distance call to Captain Magee at Jacksonville.

Briefly he told them what he knew—of Linda's decision to go "scouting," as she called it. And of her request for the revolvers.

The shock of that piece of news was almost too much for Miss Carlton. She jumped to the conclusion that the girls were dead.

"Aren't you doing a thing to find them, Captain?" she demanded, harshly.

"I was thinking about it," he replied. "But after all, they've only been gone two days——"

"You don't know my niece!" interrupted the unhappy woman. "Linda always wires or telephones me every day, when she goes on these flying trips. She doesn't forget. It's because she can't—she has been injured or killed!"

"I hope not," he replied. "But I will send a plane over the Okefenokee Swamp tomorrow, Miss Carlton," he promised.

The two women gazed at each other in helpless dismay at the conclusion of this conversa-

tion. What could they possibly do, aside from informing the newspapers—a decision which they carried out immediately.

Accordingly, on June twenty-ninth, every newspaper in the country stated the fact that Linda Carlton, the famous aviatrix who had flown to Paris alone, was missing again—somewhere in Georgia—probably in the Okefenokee Swamp, with a chum, Miss Dorothy Crowley of Spring City, who was also a pilot.

The unhappy news instantly produced the effect which Miss Carlton hoped it would accomplish. It aroused no fewer than five searching parties, all bent upon locating these two popular girls.

Captain Magee's men were the first to go. Summoning Sergeant Worth, he commandeered a plane from the airport, and directed the pilot to fly over the swamp, searching from the air by means of spy-glasses.

The second party was composed of the girls' fathers, both of whom were in New York City at the time. Mr. Crowley telephoned Mr. Carlton, and after sending a wire to their families, they boarded a Florida train together.

The third volunteers were two young men

at Green Falls, two college boys who considered Linda and Dot their special girl-friends, though neither of them was engaged. Jim Valier and Ralph Clavering heard the sad news at the out-door pool at Green Falls, just as they were about to join a group of young people for a swim. Kitty Hulbert, Ralph's married sister, read the head-lines aloud.

"Jim," muttered Ralph, when Kitty finished, "let's do something! We can take a plane to Florida—and go on a search from there."

"O.K.," agreed the other boy, and quietly and quickly the two young men disappeared from the group.

The story came to the Mackays in Washington, where Ted had business on his return from Georgia. The instant that Louise read it, she jumped up in excitement.

"We must go, Ted!" she cried. "You can get your vacation now."

"I'll wire immediately," he agreed, without an instant's hesitation, and he went out to make the necessary arrangements and to order his plane in readiness.

The fifth and last party was none other than Linda's two latest admirers, the two young

men she had mentioned to Dot in the hope of a rescue—Jackson Carter and Hal Perry.

All in all, it ought to have been enough to satisfy Miss Carlton that every effort was being made to find the girls and to bring them back to safety.

The airplane from the police department was the first of these groups to get into action, the first to enter the swamp. Yet it did not actually enter it, but merely flew above it, for the pilot, less experienced than Linda herself, did not believe it possible to come down on one of those islands. For hours, however, he circled about, over the bog, and the cypress-trees, while Sergeant Worth in the rear cock-pit scanned the landscape with his spy-glasses. But neither man saw any trace of the autogiro or the girls, and late that afternoon they had to return in discouragement to Captain Magee.

"I couldn't even locate that camp on the island," Worth said. "The one where we got the prisoners, you know. Unless you have the exact directions, it's hard to find anything in that swamp. . . . And—I don't see much use in trying again."

Captain Magee looked exceedingly grave; he

was genuinely worried. He blamed himself for letting the girls go alone. But there had been nothing official about the project—he had not really expected that they would run into the criminal. Besides, Linda Carlton had seemed so capable, and both girls were so eager to go.

"We mustn't give up, Worth," he said quietly. "It's more important to find these girls than a dozen criminals. We owe it to them, to their families—to the whole country. Everybody has admiration and affection for Miss Linda Carlton, after all she has done. . . . You'll have to go back tomorrow—or get another man, if you feel too discouraged."

"No, I'm only too glad to help," the other assured him. "I would do anything in the world for Miss Carlton. But I don't see how it can do any good. A scouting party in boats would be much more likely to be successful."

"We'll try that, too, as soon as I can get some men together. But tomorrow you fly out over the ocean to that island where the thieves had the jewels. The girls might be stranded there. Take another pilot, and a bigger plane."

Worth looked doubtful.

"We haven't any way of locating that island,

either," he said. "It was Miss Carlton who took us there before, and I have no idea where it is."

"Just do your best, Worth," urged the Captain. "Fly around all the islands near the Georgia coast, keeping a sharp look-out for the autogiro."

"Rain or shine? It looks like a storm tomorrow."

"Yes, whatever the weather, you must go—or get someone else."

So, in spite of the terrible downpour and the high winds of June thirtieth, a cabin monoplane flew across Georgia and out over the ocean to a group of islands just off the coast. Three men were aboard—two experienced pilots, one of whom was also a mechanic—besides the police officer.

Leaving the coast behind, they flew out into the grayness that was ocean and sky. The waves were high, the sea rough and angry, and the rain was coming down in sheets, blinding their vision, but they pressed on, two of the men keeping their spy-glasses on the water, watching for islands. They passed over several, but they were small, with little or no place to land.

Eagerly the men watched for some sign of human life, some signal, some glimpse of the autogiro.

"They'd never be alive if we did find them," remarked Worth, gloomily. "And if they did run into that gangster, he'd surely have made away with them."

"If only it would clear up," grumbled the pilot. "So we could see something!"

They were flying much lower now, for it was comparatively safe over the water, and despite the weather, they were able to spot the islands. All of a sudden the mechanic uttered a sharp cry.

"There she is! Look! Over there!"

"Miss Carlton?" demanded Worth, excitedly. "Where?"

"Not the girl! The plane—the autogiro! See—that island to the west! See the wind-mill on top?"

"By George! You're right!" agreed Worth, a thrill running up and down his spine. Thank Heaven, he hadn't given up!

The pilot directed the plane over the island and circled about, landing finally some distance from the autogiro. A glance at the latter as-

sured them that it had not been wrecked. Why, then, hadn't the girls come back? Was it possible that all this scare had risen to alarm the world for the simple reason that Linda Carlton had run out of gas?

The three men climbed out of the cabin and shouted as loud as they could, since the girls had evidently failed to hear their plane, above the noise of the storm and the roar of the ocean. Eagerly they waited for a reply. But when none came, fear crept over them all.

Had the girls died of starvation, or was there foul play of some kind? With gloomy forebodings, they walked about the beach, seeking evidence of some kind to tell the story of what had happened.

Finding nothing, the mechanic began to examine the autogiro. She was undamaged, unhurt—everything in order, gasoline in the tank. The engine started easily in answer to his test, and ran smoothly until he turned it off. No, the gallant little Ladybug could not be blamed for whatever disaster had taken place!

Then, forgetful of the weather, the three men set out to search the island thoroughly. Buckled in oil-skin coats, they felt protected themselves,

but Worth shuddered as he thought of these girls alone in such desolation, with no roof to cover them, no food to satisfy their hunger, or water for their thirst. Gloomy and discouraged they plowed through the wet sand, calling the girls' names. Finally, abandoning the hope of finding them alive, they set themselves to the gruesome task of looking among the underbrush for their bodies. At last they gave up.

"We'll fasten a canvas sheet over these bushes, so that we can locate the island, and we'll pin a note on it to say that we'll be back," decided Worth, "in case they are alive. One of you men take the autogiro, and the other the plane, and we'll go back now."

The rain was abating somewhat, and the two planes made the return trip without any mishaps, arriving at the Jacksonville Airport before dark that evening.

A wildly enthusiastic crowd, which had collected in spite of the weather, greeted them with resounding cheers. The Ladybug was back again—safe and sound! Women cried with joy, men threw their hats into the air, children clapped their hands and whistled. In a miniature way it was a demonstration like the one

given Lindbergh upon his arrival at the French Flying Field. But it was a false rejoicing, and the gayety was quickly changed into despair when the pilot reported that the girls themselves had not been found.

Weary and disappointed, the crowd turned away, and Sergeant Worth told the sad story to the newspaper reporters who waited to interview him, before he returned to the police headquarters.

Captain Magee was terribly affected by the news. Linda Carlton might have been his own daughter, from the grief which he could not conceal.

Two well-dressed young men were waiting in his office when Worth arrived, and they listened to the grim account. They were the first of the rescue parties to arrive from the North —Jim Valier and Ralph Clavering.

"These two young men are friends of Miss Carlton and Miss Crowley," explained the Captain. "They want to go into the swamp tomorrow in a boat. . . . Perhaps the girls have reached the main-land, or perhaps that autogiro was stolen, and they never were on the island

at all. . . . Anyhow, we'll search the swamp again. Will you go with them, Worth?"

"Certainly," agreed the sergeant, though he felt as if it would be fruitless. Those girls were at the bottom of the ocean, he was sure!

"A light motor-boat ought to be able to go up that little stream," continued the Captain. "I will have one ready at the edge of the swamp tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. If you young men will come here at nine, I'll send you over there in a car."

Jim and Ralph expressed their thanks to the officer, and promised to be on hand at the arranged time in the morning. But, like Sergeant Worth, they were exceedingly discouraged; they had little hope of success.

When they awakened the following morning, which was the first day of July—the day that Linda should have reported to Atlanta—they found that it was still raining, although the storm had ceased, giving way to a dismal drizzle. What an unpleasant day to start off on an excursion like theirs, that was gloomy at best! Yet the weather did not deter them from their purpose, nor did it stop Hal Perry and Jackson

who started earlier that morning in their canoe.

But it was difficult with a motor-boat, and all three of the men were unfamiliar with the swamp and its little streams. No one knew where to turn off, as Jackson and Hal had learned from many vacations, and after pushing ahead for two or three hours, they found themselves off their course—grounded.

"It's no use," muttered Worth. "We can't make it in a motor-boat. Magee's never been in the swamp, or he would have known. We'll have to turn back and get a canoe!"

"A whole day wasted!" growled Ralph angrily, as if it were the sergeant's fault. "A day! When every minute is precious!"

"Well, it's nobody's fault," remarked Worth. "The sooner we get back the better."

"Nobody's fault!" repeated Ralph. "No—ignorance is O.K.—if it pertains to the police! They shouldn't know a thing about the country around them!"

"No use getting mad at policemen, Ralph," drawled good-natured Jim Valier. "Haven't you learned from driving a car that it doesn't pay? Besides, they're always right."

"No, we're often very wrong," said Worth,

humbly and seriously. "And maybe you don't think I care, Mr. Clavering, about finding those girls. But I do! I haven't thought about a thing but that for the last three days."

Ralph made no answer, but applied his attention to searching the landscape with his glasses. But, like everybody else thus far, he found nothing.

Discouraged and silent, they managed to push the boat into the deeper water and to turn it around. All that afternoon they spent in retracing the progress they had made, and returned to the Captain's office just before supper.

"You want to try it again in canoes?" asked Captain Magee.

"Yes," replied Ralph. "Without any of your police this time. No use taking an extra man —it only means more provisions to carry."

"True. But you must be careful of snakes and alligators."

The boys looked none too pleased at the idea, but when they remembered that Linda and Dot, if still alive, would be subjected to the same perils, they were all the more eager to go.

This time, they decided, they would do it

scientifically; they would go prepared with a map of the swamp, equipment, food, and rifles. And above all, a compass! And they would not give up until they had searched every part of that dismal Okefenokee Swamp!

So, cheered by the optimism of youth and the promise of another day, the boys slept well that night.

Chapter XV

The Empty Island

The same morning upon which Ralph Clavering and Jim Valier went into the Okefenokee Swamp in a canoe, the fourth searching party arrived. Delayed by a stop-over in Norfolk, Virginia, where Ted had some business for the company, he and Louise did not reach the Jacksonville Airport until the morning of July second. Leaving the plane at the field, they taxied immediately to the City Hall, arriving there a little after ten.

They did not expect any good news about the missing girls, for they had read the papers and had inquired the latest word at the airport. They had gazed at the Ladybug, so forlorn and desolate in the hangar, and their fears were dark. Even Louise, who was usually optimistic, believed this time it was the end. Yet how dreadful it was! That Linda Carlton, so young, with such a glorious future before her,

should perish like this before she was twenty! When she had the whole world at her feet—a world she had won not through mere beauty and charm—although she was both beautiful and charming, but through her courage, her ability, her modesty! Louise made no attempt to hide the tears that rolled down her cheeks; even her husband's strong arm about her shoulders could not stop her sobs.

"Don't give up yet, dear!" he urged. "Why, you and I haven't even had our try."

The girl smiled bravely through her tears.

"I know, Ted dear. I'll try to remember." Her eyes brightened with genuine hope. "It always has been *you* who have rescued her! Maybe you will this tme."

"We're going to make a bigger effort than ever before," he reassured her. "Because this time I have you to help me."

The minute they entered the City Hall they saw that something had happened. Louise's heart gave a wild leap of excitement. Were Linda and Dot safe?

But no. If they were, somebody would be shouting the news from the house-tops—and

no one was looking particularly jubilant. There was a crowd outside, but it was not an exulting one. Was it possible that they had found the girls—dead? In spite of the heat of the day, a cold shiver of horror crept over Louise, and she clung tightly to her husband's arm.

They had little difficulty in passing through the crowd to the captain's office, for the latter had given orders to his men that Miss Carlton's and Miss Crowley's friends and relatives were to be admitted immediately, whenever they appeared.

As they entered the room, they saw half a dozen officials standing around, several in plain clothes, with only badges to identify them. And on a chair by the desk, opposite Captain Magee, a strange young woman was sitting.

The girl was flashily dressed—or over-dressed—in the latest style. A long green gown trailed almost to the floor, not quite concealing a bandaged ankle. Her little, off-the-face hat of the same bright color was decorated with a diamond bar-pin. Her lips and her cheeks were painted, and there was a gap in her mouth where two front teeth had been knocked out.

The Captain nodded to the Mackays to sit down, and he continued the questions he was putting to this young woman.

"You might as well confess if you know where that man is—with all the bank's money!" he was saying. "I know your scheme. Pretending you don't know where he escaped, so that you won't be locked up, and can get back to him!" His eyes narrowed, and he lowered his voice to an uncanny whisper. "But we'll keep you here till you tell where that thief is!"

"I can't tell you—when I don't know!" she persisted. "He ran off from me—he never wanted me with him anyway. I'll swear to it, Sir, if you think I'm lyin'. . . . Besides, he hasn't got that money."

"Then where is it?"

"Linda—and the cops she had with her—tricked us, double-crossed us, by swiping the money and fillin' the bags with sand. The Doc was in such a hurry to get away from those cops, he never found it out till we were on that yacht. He was afraid to go back."

Captain Magee leaned forward eagerly at the mention of Linda Carlton's name. She was far

more important than the money that had been stolen.

"Miss Carlton?" he demanded. "With the police? Where did you see her?"

Susie shook her head.

"No, I didn't actually see her. But I saw her Bug, with her stuff in it—a bag and a basket of food. I tossed them out of the plane, too, so she wouldn't starve when we swiped the plane. You can put that down to my credit."

"You stole the autogiro?"

"No. Only borrowed it. Left it on an island —you can get it when you want it."

"We have it. . . . Now, suppose instead of my asking you questions, you tell us the whole story, Miss——?"

"*Mrs.* Slider, if you please," she said. "I am a widow." She lowered her eyes dramatically, enjoying the sensation of holding the center of the stage.

"Well," she began, "after my husband got killed in the plane accident that Linda probably told you about, she and I got to be quite good friends. I even promised to leave the gang and go straight, for I never really took part in any of their stealing myself—believe it or not!

Linda left me on that island in the swamp, and promised to come back for me when she came for the Bug."

"But you weren't there when Miss Carlton returned!" Captain Magee reminded her.

"No. I got terrible lonesome. If you ever spend a night in the swamp with only a dead man for company—oh, he was buried all right, but it was spooky just the same—you'd excuse me for takin' the first way out, Sir. The Doc come along, in his canoe, and I promised him my diamond ring if he'd take me away. . . . Well, we got out of the swamp in his boat, and hired a Ford across Georgia. Then we took a motor-boat out to that island in the ocean."

Everyone waited breathlessly; at last the girl was coming to the part they all longed to hear about—the part of the story in which Linda Carlton figured. Pausing dramatically, Susie asked for a glass of water.

"Go on!" urged the captain, as soon as she had drained it.

"It was a terrible boat," she finally continued. "An awful old one. You can imagine going ten miles out to sea in a thing like that! The engine gave out——"

"Never mind all that!" commanded the officer, impatiently. "Come to the point."

"Yes, Sir. . . . Well, we got to the island finally, and waited for the yacht that was to pick us up and take us to Panama, but before she come along, the autogiro arrived. Linda—and the police, of course."

"Did you see them—the police, I mean?" was the next question.

"No, we didn't. We were too scared, so we hid till they got out of the plane and searched the island. Then we grabbed the bags and ran for the plane. I flew the Bug out to sea, and in a few minutes we spotted our yacht, and signaled it to stop on another island. That's where we left Linda's plane. . . . When we got to Panama, the Doc slipped off, and I got caught. . . . So you see there's nothing to punish *me* for—you got the autogiro back, and the cops, or Linda, took the money——"

"There were no policemen with Miss Carlton," Captain Magee informed Susie. "Only another girl. But they are lost."

"They must be still on that island, waiting for you to come for them. Nothing could hurt them, and they had some food. . . ."

This was enough for Ted Mackay. Jumping to his feet, he announced his intention of flying there immediately.

"Give me the latitude and longitude of that island!" he demanded. "There isn't a moment to lose!"

"The what?" asked Susie, wrinkling her nose.

"Show me where it is on a map," explained Ted.

"Yeah," agreed Susie, pointing out the island on a map of the Georgia coast, which the Captain took from his desk. "But what's the grand rush?"

"You've forgotten the storm we just had!" said the young man. "The girls may be sick or dead by this time."

"Girls," repeated Susie, significantly. "It beats everything the way they fooled us—in their riding-breeches! If the Doc ever finds out he ran away from a pair of girls——"

"Never mind all that, Mrs. Slider," interrupted Captain Magee, signaling to the prison matron to take the girl away. . . . "Now, Mr. Mackay, is there anything I can do for you, before you go?"

"You might get me a taxi," replied Ted. "To take my wife and myself to the airport."

"Take my private car," offered the Captain, rising to say good-by. "And good luck to you!"

Louise was so excited at the whole occurrence that she could scarcely sit still in the limousine, as it sped over to the airport.

"If we only aren't too late! Ted, do you suppose they're starved? What does it feel like to starve to death? Or to die of thirst?"

"I wouldn't worry too much about thirst," he reassured her. "Because of that big rain we had. They could get water from it, you know."

"I never thought of that!"

"The worst is over now, I'm sure," continued Ted. "Five days isn't so long, and the girl said they had food. Besides, it wasn't cold. Think of that time you girls were lost in Canada!"

Louise shuddered; she could still remember that long, hopeless night very vividly, when she and Linda had jumped from parachutes down into the snow of the Canadian Woods, and how they had been forced to keep walking to avoid freezing to death.

"Still, we found a shack to sleep in. And Linda and Dot haven't even a blanket to cover them in all that storm!"

"Well, they were together, that's one thing to be thankful for."

"Yes—and I'm glad Linda's companion is Dot. Of all our crowd at Spring City, Dot Crowley is the nicest girl—after Linda, of course. Most of the girls, like Kitty Clavering —Kitty Hulbert, I mean—or Sue Emery, would be pitying themselves so that they'd make Linda miserable. But not Dot. She always sees the bright side of everything."

"And wasn't it clever the way they got hold of that money, and fooled that bandit!" exulted Ted. "My, but that was slick. And think what it's going to mean to that bank and its depositors! Because if that fellow hadn't been fooled, he'd have made off with it. I don't believe they'll ever find him now."

"I guess nobody will care if he never comes back to the United States!" agreed Louise.

They arrived at the airport and found the plane in readiness, wheeled out on the runway, and Ted took time to give it an inspection himself, while Louise ran off to get the necessary

supplies—some food and water, and a first-aid kit, as a necessary precaution. She borrowed sweaters and knickers from the supply at the airport, for she reasoned that Linda and Dot would be chilled and drenched from the rain. Dry clothing ought to be a god-send, even if they used it only on the short trip back in the plane.

Inside of an hour they took off. It was still drizzling, but Ted was such an experienced navigator that he had no difficulty at all in flying in any kind of weather, and he found the island from Susie's directions. Shortly after noon, he brought it down on the beach.

A feeling of apprehension stole over Louise, when she saw neither of the girls on the shore to greet them. In spite of the noise of ocean, surely they would have heard the plane! Why weren't they there?

Ted turned off the motor, and looked about expectantly.

"Do you suppose they're both sick—or injured?" faltered Louise. She did not add, "or dead," but she could not help thinking it.

"Maybe they didn't hear us. Let's shout together—'Linda and Dot!' If they hear their

first names, they'll know we're friends, maybe recognize our voices. You see they may be hiding—for fear it's that gangster returning."

"I never thought of that," replied Louise, more hopefully. "All right—both together when I count three.

"One—two—three!"

"LINDA AND DOT!"

Their voices rose clearly over the splashing of the waves, and they waited tensely.

But there was no reply!

They waited, and tried again. . . . Still silence. . . . Louise put out her hand, and grasped her husband's, in fear.

"What does it mean?" she cried, in anguish. "Is this surely the right island? There seemed to be a lot of them."

"Maybe it isn't," he answered, optimistically. "That girl seemed to be telling the truth—but she was a queer one. Besides, she might not be sure which island it was. . . . Anyway, we'll search. If Linda and Dot were here, we'll see some evidences of their camp—burnt out fires, or worn paths, or something. Come on, let's start!"

Arm in arm they began their search, stepping

carefully through the underbrush, now and then stopping to call, "Linda" or "Dot," in the hope that the girls might only have been asleep. They did not have to go far before they saw that at least someone had been here recently, for there was a path worn through the underbrush.

Farther and farther in they went, until they came to a small cluster of pine trees. And here, sure enough, they found the remains, or rather the ashes, for the place had been left neat, of a camp fire.

The sight of this forsaken spot brought sudden tears to Louise's eyes.

"They've been dragged off and killed! I just know it!" she moaned.

"Don't cry, please, dear," begged Ted. "We're not sure yet. This may not be their island—their fire. Somebody else may have camped here. Let's look about a bit."

Slowly they walked around the place, examining the ground for some forgotten belonging that would identify the former campers. Noticing a pile of leaves where someone had evidently made a bed, Louise kicked them aside with her foot, and she saw an empty match-

box. It wasn't much, but it was something, and she leaned over and picked it up.

The letters on the lid leaped out at her like living tongues. Marked with a purple rubber-stamp over the trade-mark, were the words:

"J. Vetter, Spring City, Ohio."

The explanation was only too plain. No one but Dot and Linda could have used that box. Louise dropped to the ground in an agony of wretchedness, and buried her face in her hands.

Even the optimistic Ted found all his hopes blasted by this little box. Gloom spread over his features, and he sat down beside his wife, comforting her as best he could.

For fifteen minutes, perhaps, they remained motionless, overcome by the thought of their friends' awful death. The food which they had brought with the idea of sharing a gay picnic lunch with Dot and Linda was forgotten. Though they had not eaten since breakfast, neither Ted nor Louise could have swallowed a mouthful.

At last Ted got up, gently raising Louise to her feet. Each silently decided to make one more search—a gruesome one this time—for the girls' bodies.

Round and round the island they walked,

looking carefully, among the underbrush, near to the beach, even scanning the water with their spy-glasses. But they saw nothing. That one match-box had been their only evidence. Like good campers to the end, Linda and Dot had burned every trace of rubbish.

It was mid-afternoon when Ted realized that Louise was faint from hunger and thirst, and he made her sit down while he brought some supplies from the plane. She drank the water eagerly, but she could not eat. For Louise Mackay was going through the deepest tragedy of her young life: her first experience with the loss of a loved one.

During the entire flight homeward she kept her hand on Ted's knee, but she did not utter a word.

Chapter XVI

Searching the Ocean

Louise and Ted Mackay did not go to the police headquarters that night. They were too miserable, too discouraged by the outcome of their excursion to the island. After leaving the plane at the airport, Ted called Captain Magee on the telephone, and briefly related the results of their flight.

Supper was a dreary affair for them both. It was only by putting forth a tremendous effort that they ate at all—in an attempt to stave off exhaustion. The ice cream, at least, tasted good to Louise, for she was still very hot.

The worst ordeal of all came after the meal, just as the saddened young couple were passing through the hotel lobby to take the elevator to their room. Louise suddenly recognized two familiar figures at the desk, two men who had just arrived with their luggage. Mr. Crowley and Mr. Carlton—the fathers of the two unfortunate girls!

The tears which Louise had bravely forced back ever since her collapse at the discovery of the match-box on the island, rushed to her eyes again. How could they ever tell these two men the terrible news?

For an instant she hoped they would not see her or her husband, that she could at least put off the evil tidings until the morning. But it was not to be. Linda's father recognized her instantly, and came quickly towards her.

"Louise!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand. "And Ted! Any news?"

Louise could not answer for the sob that was choking her, and Ted, shy as he always was, knew it was his duty to explain.

"Bad news, Sir," he said. "We had information this morning that the girls were stranded on an island in the ocean, and that their autogiro had been stolen from them. As you probably read in the newspaper, it was found yesterday. . . . We—Lou and I—flew to the island where the girls were supposed to be, this afternoon, and found evidences of their camp—burnt out fires—but no trace of the girls."

Mr. Carlton looked grave.

"But they may have been rescued," suggested Mr. Crowley, who had the same optimistic disposition as his daughter.

"Possibly," admitted Ted. "But if they had, wouldn't we have heard? The whole country is waiting for news of those two brave girls."

"I'm afraid you're right," agreed Mr. Carlton, darkly. "Yes, you must be right. Foul play——"

"Or the ocean!" put in Louise. "Oh, the cruel, dreadful ocean! If it couldn't swallow Linda up on her flight to Paris, it had to have its revenge now!"

"Have you had your dinner, Sir?" asked Ted of Mr. Carlton.

"Yes. On the train. Suppose we get our rooms —I'll ask for a private sitting-room—and then we can all go up and discuss the matter together from every angle, and decide upon what is the best thing for us to do."

Louise brightened at this ray of hope.

"Then you're not going to give up yet, Mr. Carlton?" she inquired.

"Never, till we find them—dead or alive. We're going to think of no news as good news."

Mr. Crowley nodded his approval.

"I have a week's vacation," added Ted, "and I shall be at your service."

"Thank you, my boy," answered Mr. Carlton, gratefully. He was a great admirer of Ted Mackay, ever since he had recovered from his prejudice against him because he was the son of a ne'er-do-well.

The new-comers made their arrangements at the desk, and were fortunate enough to secure a very pleasant suite. Louise and Ted went up in the elevator with them, and Mr. Carlton ordered coffee to be sent to the room.

They settled down into the easy chairs and Louise poured the iced-coffee. The evening was hot, but there were large windows on three sides of the sitting-room, and a lovely breeze was blowing. Mr. Carlton brought out cigars and offered one to Ted.

"But I suppose you'd rather have a cigarette," he said, when Ted refused.

"No thank you, Sir. I never smoke. A great many of us pilots don't. We want to keep as fit as possible."

Mr. Carlton nodded. Linda had never expressed any desire to smoke, and he supposed it was for the same reason.

"There are two places where the girls might be," he said slowly, as he puffed on his cigar. "On another of those small islands, off the coast, or in some boat—on the ocean. If they had reached the coast, we should have heard of it."

"A boat!" repeated Louise, with sudden inspiration. "There was that broken down motorboat, that the girl and the gangster used to get to the island! Could Dot and Linda have gone off in that?"

"What boat?" demanded Mr. Carlton and Mr. Crowley, both at once.

Louise explained by repeating most of the story which they had heard from Susie that morning.

"Funny we didn't think of that before," observed Ted. "Come to remember, I didn't see any boat this afternoon. Did you, Lou?"

"No, I didn't. And we searched the whole island," she explained to the older men. "We'd surely have seen it if there had been one."

"This sounds hopeful!" exclaimed Mr. Crowley, joyfully. "If it didn't have a leak——"

"But didn't you say that it was broken?" asked Mr. Carlton.

"The girl said the engine was broken, but as far as I know, the boat itself was sound," replied Ted.

"Linda could fix the engine!" cried Louise, almost hysterical in her relief. For the first time since the finding of the match-box, she actually believed that Linda and Dot were still alive.

"We'll work on that theory, anyway," decided Mr. Carlton. "And go out on the ocean tomorrow."

Before they could discuss their plans any further, the telephone on the desk interrupted them, and Mr. Carlton was informed that there were two young men who wanted to see him—Ralph Clavering and James Valier.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed Mr. Carlton, who had not even known that the boys had started South. "Yes," he added to the clerk on the phone, "ask them to come up right away, by all means."

"Who? What?" demanded Louise, eagerly. "Any news?"

"I don't know yet. Ralph and Jim are here."

"They would be," smiled Louise. Linda could

never get away from Ralph Clavering, no matter how far she went.

A minute later the boys appeared, dressed in camping clothes, looking very unlike the neat, immaculate young men they always appeared to be at Spring City, or at Green Falls. Even if they took part in athletics at home, their white flannels were always spotless. But now, except for the fact that their faces were clean and shaved, they looked like tramps.

Ralph and Jim were just as much surprised to see Ted and Louise as the latter were at their visit.

"Where in the world have you been?" demanded Louise, in amazement at their appearance. "You both look as if you had been shipwrecked and lost besides."

"We have," muttered Jim, sinking wearily into a seat, and extending his long legs in front of him. "Please pardon our slouching, Lou—but we're dead."

"But where have you been?" repeated Mr. Carlton.

"In the Okefenokee Swamp!" answered Ralph. "And if Lou weren't here, I'd tell you what it's like, in no uncertain language!"

Mr. Carlton smiled, and yet he was horror stricken. If these boys found it so dreadful, what must it have seemed like to Linda?

"Tell us about it!" he urged. "But wait, have you had your supper?"

"Yes. We had food along with us. We left the canoe at the edge of the stream, and taxied back here, because we have rooms in this hotel. They told us at the desk that 'Miss Carlton's father had arrived,' so we didn't wait even to change our clothing. We had to get the news of the girls immediately."

"I'm afraid there isn't much to tell," sighed Louise. "At least nothing hopeful." Briefly she repeated what she and Ted had been doing all afternoon, as a result of Susie's capture and story, and she displayed the match-box, with the name of Spring City stamped on its lid.

"I recall Linda's getting that from her aunt," remarked Ralph, dolefully. "She asked for half a dozen boxes, and Miss Carlton got them right away, so she wouldn't forget."

"Now tell us what you boys have been doing," urged Mr. Crowley. "And Louise, why don't you pour them some of this iced-coffee? It really is very refreshing."

Briefly Ralph told his story, aided now and then by Jim. Their second expedition into the swamp had been as useless as their first, though they admitted the superiority of a canoe over a motor-boat, if one knew where to go. But they had become hopelessly lost in a couple of hours, in spite of their maps, and, as time passed, they became all the more certain that the girls were not in the swamp. They decided to turn back, in order to concentrate their efforts on the islands near where the autogiro had been found.

Susie's story naturally confirmed their suspicions, and they instantly agreed with Mr. Carlton to abandon all further search of the Okefenokee.

"I believe the thing to do," announced the latter, after serious contemplation, "is to hire a yacht, and cruise all along the Georgia and Florida coast. The most reasonable explanation to me is that Linda and Dot are adrift somewhere in that motor-boat. Either the engine is broken beyond repair, or the gasoline has given out."

"Or that terrible storm has wrecked them," faltered Louise, who could not silence her fear

of the ocean. "Upset that little boat, and——"

"Don't, Lou!" cried Jim. "Don't even think of things like that, unless we find an empty boat!"

"I'll try not to," she promised.

"Well, whatever has happened, the ocean is the place for us to be, if we hope to rescue the girls," concluded Mr. Carlton. "You all agree on that point?"

Everyone assented, and Ralph and Jim expressed their desire to get into action immediately.

"We ought to be able to get a yacht tomorrow," continued Mr. Carlton. "Because of the publicity of this affair someone who has one ready will probably be glad to rent it to us on the spot. I think I'll go to the newspaper office tonight, and have the request broadcast by radio."

"Great!" exclaimed Louise, jumping up excitedly. "And can we all go with you tomorrow, on the cruise, I mean, Mr. Carlton?"

"You can do just as you prefer—go with me, or use your own plane to fly around over the islands."

"I think that would be the better plan for

us, Sir," put in Ted. "And we can keep in touch with you by signals."

The group separated at last, the older men to call their families by long-distance, the young people to get a good night's sleep after their strenuous day. In the morning they re-assembled at breakfast, when Mr. Carlton announced the good news that he had been offered a yacht by a wealthy man in Jacksonville.

"He even refused to take any rent for it, much as I urged him to," he added. "And he's lending us the crew besides. It seems too good to be true."

"All of which goes to show just how popular Linda is—with everybody!" explained Louise. "Oh, we simply must find her!"

There were no preparations to be made for the cruise, because the owner of the yacht assured Mr. Carlton that everything was in readiness, so by ten o'clock on the morning of July third, the little party, composed of the two fathers and the two boy-friends of the lost girls stepped aboard the boat. It was a beautiful little yacht, complete in every detail. Under any other circumstances the men would have been overjoyed at the prospect of such a pleas-

ant trip. As it was, they were too worried to think of anything but Linda and Dot.

"What a marvelous time we could be having if the girls were aboard!" lamented Ralph. "Dance and play bridge all day, every day, with no other fellows to cut in on us, and take them away! I say, Jim, we might even come back engaged if we had a chance like that!"

"Much more likely they'd be so sick of us they'd never want to see us again!" returned the other, shrewdly. "No—cruising's all right. But I'd rather be in Green Falls if Linda and Dot were with us."

"Maybe this will teach Linda a lesson," grumbled Ralph. Then he suddenly remembered her job, with the Spraying Company in Atlanta. He couldn't pretend to be sorry if she lost it.

The speedy little yacht cruised all day along the coast, while the men played bridge, and smoked, and ate the most excellent meals, cooked and served by an efficient staff. But underneath all this comfort ran an under-current of anxiety, especially towards evening, when darkness came on, and no sign of the girls had been seen.

Several air-planes had flown over their heads during the day, and once they saw Ted's plane. Dropping low, Louise waved her handkerchief, which was the pre-arranged signal to tell them that the flyers had found nothing, and Ralph waved his in return, conveying the same information. Should they have anything to report, Ted announced that he would put his plane through a series of stunts, and, in the case of the yacht's making a discovery, Jim Valier promised to climb up on the rail.

But the air-plane and the yacht passed each other with only a dismal fluttering of handkerchiefs.

"Something's bound to happen tomorrow," said Jim, as he crawled into his bunk that night. "It'll be the fourth of July!"

"By Jove! It will!" exclaimed Ralph. "We ought to get some bang-up excitement!"

But the thing that happened was what they had all been silently dreading—the fate which only Louise had mentioned, that night in the hotel sitting-room.

About noon—off the coast of Florida—Jim Valier spotted an overturned old motor-boat, bouncing helplessly about on the ocean!

Chapter XVII

On to Cuba

When the storm came at dawn on the thirtieth of June, it awakened Linda first. As the rain descended upon the slickers that covered the girls, and upon their faces, Dot merely buried her head sleepily under the rain-coat, but Linda sat bolt upright on the bed of leaves.

The wind was howling about the lonely island, and the rain was pouring down in sheets. The blackness of it all was terrifying, yet she knew that she must get up.

"Dot!" she whispered, hoarsely. "Wake up!"

Her companion opened her eyes sleepily as she pushed the slicker aside.

"Yes. . . . Why Linda, it's—pouring!"

"It certainly is." Linda was slipping on her shoes and her knickers over her pajamas. "We've got to rescue the boat."

"Why?"

"Because water mustn't get into the gasoline. And because the tide might come up high enough to wash the boat out to sea."

"O.K.," replied Dot, now quite wide awake. "I'm with you, Linda—in just a second."

Holding on to each other's hands, they made their way with difficulty down to the beach where the boat had been left, and together they dragged it back and covered it with one of the slickers.

Panting from the effort, they dropped back on the sand and sat down, not bothering about the rain that was descending relentlessly upon them, soaking them to the skin.

"We might as well use the other slicker as a roof for ourselves," suggested Dot, as she got to her feet again. "We can hang it over some bushes, and crawl under it."

"That's an idea!" approved Linda. "I was wondering how one raincoat could keep us both dry."

"It won't keep us dry—we're wet now. But it will protect us from the worst force of this cloud-burst."

They went back to their camping site and arranged the slicker as best they could—care-

fully putting the bag of money and the box of tools under it, before they crawled in themselves. The bushes were wet, and so was the ground, but the girls were saved the discomfort of having the rain actually pour in their faces.

They watched the storm for some time, hoping that it would soon abate, and finally, becoming drowsy, they fell asleep again, with their feet sticking out under the covering.

Cramped by the awkward position, they awakened in a couple of hours. Daylight had arrived—but not sunlight. It was still raining steadily and dismally.

"Don't you suppose we can go today?" asked Dot.

"Maybe later on," replied Linda, cheerfully. "There's one thing good about this, Dot. We can get a drink."

"How heavenly!" exclaimed the other, sitting up. "But how do we manage it? We won't get much by just opening our mouths!"

"Get up carefully. I'm sure there's a lot of water lodging on the top of this slicker. Wait—get the thermos bottles out of the tool-box first. We'll use the cups, and then stand them up to catch the rain as it falls."

Linda's surmise was correct; there was so much water on the slicker that it was in danger of collapsing any moment. They dipped their cups into the pool and drank eagerly. How good it tasted to their parched throats!

"There must be more down on the boat's cover," suggested Dot. "Let's get it, and pour it into our thermos bottles."

When they had carried out this idea, they set the bottles firmly in the sand, and crept back under cover.

"Shall we eat?" asked Dot, after watching the rain for some minutes in silence.

"Let's wait a while—till noon, if we can. We have only those two oranges and a half a dozen crackers. It'll be something to look forward to."

"There's still some tea and sugar—and one can of milk," the other reminded her. "You know we didn't use them, because we couldn't afford the water. Now it'll be different."

"I'd forgotten all about that!" exclaimed Linda, smiling. "Let's have tea and one cracker for lunch, and save the oranges for supper."

"But how can we ever hope to build a fire in this rain? We'd never find any dry sticks

—and if we made one under here, we'd be smoked out."

"I hadn't thought of that. But we can make cold tea. If we leave the leaves in the water long enough, they'll flavor it—anyway, that's what I read in an ad one time."

"You think of everything, Linda! It's no wonder you've gotten out of a dozen disasters that would have killed an ordinary girl!"

"Now Dot!" protested the other girl, modestly. "Just so long as we get out of this one, I'll be satisfied."

To help pass the tediousness of the long gloomy day, the girls took a brisk walk encircling the entire island. Soaked as they were before they started, they decided it would be foolish to stop because of the rain. The sight of the ocean, wild and angry as it was because of the storm, aroused their wonder and admiration, and rewarded them for their wet excursion. In vain they squinted through the spyglasses for a glimpse of the autogiro, but even the island on which it had been left by Susie was obliterated from their vision.

It was no wonder, therefore, that they did not see the plane which brought Sergeant Worth

and the two pilots to that other island. All unaware that Ladybug had flown home that afternoon, the girls finally settled down after dark to try to sleep under their improvised roof.

When they awakened the following morning, they were disappointed not to see the sun. It was still raining, but no longer in torrents; the storm had slackened to a monotonous drizzle.

"We better go," said Linda, as they breakfasted on tea and two crackers apiece. "I can keep the engine pretty well covered up. And this rain may keep up for days."

"I shouldn't care to keep up this reducing diet for days," observed Dot. "If we were only too fat, Linda, how we would welcome such a chance to starve ourselves!"

"Yes. . . . If—Oh, Dot, don't you wish we had a thick steak now—smothered in mushrooms——"

"With creamed potatoes and fresh peas——"

"Fruit salad and cheese wafers——"

"Meringues, salted nuts, and coffee!"

Both girls suddenly laughed out loud.

"Anyway, we can both have our drinks of

water," concluded Dot. "And they say thirst is worse than hunger."

"We'll fill both thermos bottles before we push off," said Linda. "But I'm counting on reaching the Ladybug before noon, and then we ought to get to the Georgia coast by two o'clock."

"Where we eat that dinner!" added Dot.

Carrying their belongings, they walked down to the beach in their rain-soaked clothing, and pushed the boat out towards the water. The ocean was still so high and so rough that Linda hesitated a moment.

"Do you think we can make it?" asked Dot, noticing the expression of doubt on her companion's face.

"Yes, I think so. That island didn't look far, yesterday."

"That's true. But I can't see it now, Linda. Suppose the storm had washed the Ladybug away—or even the whole island?"

Linda shuddered, realizing that there was that possibility. She took the glasses from her pocket, and peered through them in the direction she remembered the island to be.

"I can't see a thing but ocean," she stated.

"The waves are so high. But let's go in that direction anyway. It must be there."

She turned to the motor-boat and attempted to start the engine, but for some minutes she labored in vain, for the engine refused to catch. Was everything in the world against them, Dot silently wondered, as she watched Linda repeat her efforts with infinite patience.

At last, however, there was a sputter, and the motor started. The girls pushed the boat into the water and climbed into it.

It would have been great sport riding the waves, had it not been for the grave danger attached. This was no sporting contest, with a life-guard in readiness to rescue them if anything went wrong! It was a race between life and death.

The wind had died down, however, and the sea was gradually growing calmer. Up and down the little boat bobbed, now in the trough of a wave, seemingly under a mountain of water —now rising again to a height that made the girls think of a scenic-railway at a pleasure park. Dot screamed with excitement, but Linda's lips were set in a firm line of determination, her attention riveted on the engine.

By some miracle, it seemed to the girls, the little boat forged triumphantly ahead, with its motor running smoothly. A feeling of confidence was gradually taking the place of fear, and Dot strained her eyes for the island that was their goal. Half an hour later she spotted it, and almost upset the boat in her joy.

"There it is, Linda!" she cried, excitedly. "Oh, Linda, we're saved! We're——" She stopped suddenly, hardly able to believe her eyes. The autogiro was gone!

"What's the matter, Dot?" asked Linda, unable to understand the abrupt end of her chum's rejoicing. "Anything wrong?"

"Yes. . . . The Ladybug's gone!"

"What? Oh, it can't be!" Linda's voice was hoarse with terror. "Look again, Dot—you have the glasses."

Dot squinted her eyes, but was rewarded by no trace of the plane.

"You take a look, Linda," she suggested. "Maybe you can see better."

The other girl eagerly caught the glasses which her companion tossed, and with trembling fingers held them to her eyes. The island was in plain sight now, but it was a ghastly

fact that the autogiro had completely disappeared.

Linda continued to gaze at the barren spot, her eyes fixed and staring, as if she were looking at death itself. Then, dropping the glasses into her lap, she seemed to be thinking intently.

"It's true, Dot," she said, in an expressionless tone. "Yet that must be the right island. . . . Something has happened. . . . I don't know whether the wind could have lifted the Ladybug—or whether that gangster came back for it. . . . In any case, there's only one thing for us to do."

"Yes?" faltered Dot, biting her lips to keep back the tears. She must not fail Linda now, in her darkest hour.

"Turn the boat around, and make for the shore. We mustn't waste another drop of gasoline. It—won't last forever."

"Shall we go back to our island—if we can find it?" asked Dot, as she turned the wheel.

"No, we'll go straight west. . . . Or is that the west? Oh, if we only had a compass, or the sun to guide us. . . . But that must be the right direction."

Linda was speaking bravely, trying to keep her voice normal, and her companion took heart from her manner. The boat went forward in the opposite direction, presumably towards the coast.

Half an hour passed in silence, each girl intent upon her task. Linda took out her extra can of gasoline and filled the tank. Once Dot drank some water from the thermos bottle and reminded Linda of hers. All the while they continued to keep a sharp look-out for the coast.

Another hour passed, and the girls' hunger began to assault them. The rain continued to fall, and weariness stole over them both. They were too weak and too tired to talk.

At last Linda broke the silence by asking Dot to take another good look for the coast through the glasses. She did not add that it was vital this time, that the gasoline was running very low. On a rough sea like this, oars would be out of the question, even if the girls had been as strong as boys.

"I can't see anything but water," was the reply.

But just at that moment Linda saw something that held her speechless with terror. The

boat was springing a leak! Water appeared to be pouring in by the bucket-full!

As the significance of this catastrophe dawned upon Linda, her throat grew dry and parched; the words with which she meant to tell Dot choked her so that she could not speak. How, oh how could she possibly inform her brave chum of what was literally their death sentence?

It was Dot, however, who spoke instead. Rather, she cried out hysterically,

"Linda, I see a boat! A steam-boat! Coming towards us!"

"Where?" gasped the other girl, her heart beating wildly between hope and fear.

"Right ahead! Look! You can see her without the glasses now!"

Linda shot a swift glance at the approaching boat, then looked again at the floor, where the water was fast deepening. Would the rescue come in time? And would the boat stop at their signal of distress?

Wild with excitement, both girls raised their arms and waved desperately at the approaching craft, until it was only fifty yards away. Then they both shouted with a power and volume

that they would not have believed they possessed.

The on-coming boat decreased its speed until it was almost beside the girls' sinking craft. To their overwhelming joy and relief, they saw that it was stopping. A man appeared on the deck, and called to them in a pleasant voice.

"In trouble, girls?"

"Our boat's sinking!" shouted Linda to Dot's amazement, for the latter was still unaware of the immediate tragedy that was threatening them. "Can you take us aboard?"

"Sure!" he replied. "Wait till I get a rope ladder."

While he was gone, Linda pointed to the water in the boat, which by this time Dot had seen, and signaled to the other girl to say nothing of their experiences to this man, until they learned more about him. Linda's recent association with criminals had made her exceedingly wary.

"Pull up closer," instructed the man, as he returned with the ladder. "Now, can you climb?"

"Easily!" Dot assured him. "We're in knickers, anyhow."

"May we throw our stuff on board first?" inquired Linda, picking up the bag which contained, besides their few possessions, all the bank's money.

"Sure! Anything breakable in it?"

"Only a couple of mirrors," returned Dot, who had regained her cheerfulness with amazing speed. "And we're not afraid of bad luck," she added.

A moment later the girls climbed to safety, and pressed their rescuer's hand in gratitude. It seemed like a miracle to them both, and the old seaman was like an angel from heaven.

"How soon will we get to the coast?" asked Linda eagerly.

The man shook his head.

"We can't go to the coast," he replied. "We're headed for Cuba."

"But we must get back as soon as possible," pleaded Linda, beginning to wonder whether she was about to be kidnaped again.

"You were headed for the open ocean," the seaman informed her, to both girls' consternation. "And that's where we have to go. I can't stop at the United States. . . . I'm awfully sorry. . . ."

Chapter XVIII

Luck for Ted and Louise

Linda and Dot stood still on the deck of the old boat, grasping the rail with their hands, and looking intently at their rescuer. He was a typical old seaman, with tanned, roughened face, a gray beard, and kindly blue eyes.

"That was a narrow escape," he remarked. "What do you girls mean by going out on a rough sea like this, in a shell like you had?"

"We couldn't help it," Linda replied. "And we thought the boat was safe. We didn't know it was going to spring a leak. . . . Would it take very long to run us to the coast, Mr.—Captain——?"

"Smallweed," supplied the man. "And everybody calls me 'Cap'n'."

"Well, would it, Captain Smallweed?" repeated Linda, amused at the name. He ought to be at home on the island they had just come from, she thought—there were so many "small weeds" growing there!

"Too long fer me to stop," he replied, to the girls' dismay. "I got to get back to my family, in Havana." His blue eyes twinkled. "Why? What have you girls got in that bag, that's so important to deliver in a hurry?"

"You think we're boot-leggers!" laughed Dot. "Don't you, Captain?"

"I wouldn't be surprised at anything," he answered, smiling. "I've seen just as nice lookin' girls as you——"

"I'm afraid we're not very nice looking," sighed Linda, surveying their drenched, bedraggled clothing. "But we're really not boot-leggers. . . . We want to get back so that we can telephone to our families. They probably think that storm was the end of us."

"Well, I'm sorry, but I can't go off my course. Like to, if I had the time——"

"Well, if you can't, you can't—that's all there is to it," said Linda, philosophically. "We're glad to be alive at all, and I don't suppose a couple of days will make any difference."

"How long do you think it will take you to get to Cuba?" put in Dot anxiously. There was no use fussing, of course, but she could not

forget that her mother and father would be frantic by this time.

"I'm reckonin' on dockin' at Havana the fourth of July. This is only the first, but these are stormy seas, and we have to expect delays. . . . Now come on inside, out o' this drizzle. You girls are drenched—I'll have to give you the only cabin I got. To get yourselves dry in."

Stooping over, he picked up Linda's tool-box, and finding it heavy, eyed it suspiciously.

"You girls gangsters?" he asked, unexpectedly. "Got any guns on you?"

Both girls felt themselves growing red at this accusation, yet they could not deny it wholly.

"That box has the tools in it which I used to fix up the engine of the motor-boat," Linda finally explained. "And you can take our word that we're not gangsters."

But they were exceedingly nervous as they followed the Captain to the cabin where there were two bunks, one on top of the other. Suppose he should decide to search them—and find not only the two revolvers, but all that money besides! He would never believe their story!

"When you get dry, I'll take you over the

whole boat," he said. "I carry tobacco up the coast every couple of months. Used to have a sail-boat—that was the real thing! But this little lady's speedy—and better in a storm like we just had."

"How can we ever thank you enough, Captain Smallweed?" cried Dot, suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of gratitude for their safety. "Our fathers will send you a handsome reward when we get back home."

"Never mind that," smiled the man. "I've got a girl of my own—she's married now—but she's still a kid to me, and I know how I'd want her treated. . . . Now, you can bolt this door if you want to, so there won't be any danger of either of the two other fellows aboard coming in accidentally—and you can get yourselves dry."

"There's—there's just one thing, Captain," stammered Linda. "We're dreadfully hungry. Could we have a piece of bread, or anything to eat?"

"You poor kids!" he exclaimed, in a fatherly tone. "Come on down to the kitchen, and you can help yourselves."

Though the food he provided was not the

steak dinner they had been dreaming about on the island, it tasted good to those two starved girls. Captain Smallweed made tea for them, and brought out bread and smoked sausages, and Linda and Dot ate every crumb of the repast.

"We were marooned on an island during that storm," Linda explained. "And we have had nothing but a couple of oranges and a few crackers for two days."

"Well, you'll get a good supper," the Captain promised them. "That's why I'm not givin' you more now. I'll knock on your door about eight o'clock, if you ain't awake before then. That's when we usually eat."

When the girls were finally alone in their cabin, they gazed first at their bag of money, then at each other, and suddenly started to laugh. It was such a ridiculous situation. During those lonely days of exile on the island they had pictured their return so differently. It would be a grand occasion, with exciting telephone calls to their families, a marvelous dinner at a hotel, perhaps a radio broadcast of their safe landing! Instead of all that, here they were, stowed away in a shabby boat, sus-

pected of crime, and feasting on stale bread and hot dogs for their banquet! Worst of all there would be three weary days of waiting before informing the world of their safety! Yet they were thankful indeed that they had been rescued at all, and by a man as kind-hearted as the old sea captain.

"I don't really think he'll bother any more about that bag," said Linda, as she took off her wet shoes. "If only we can get it back to Jacksonville safely, from Cuba! If we only had the Ladybug!"

"It's a mystery where she could have vanished to," observed Dot. "But I suppose that is a small thing, compared to saving our lives."

"You'll never go anywhere with me again," sighed Linda. "Dot!" she exclaimed abruptly, "I'd forgotten all about my job!"

"I hadn't forgotten I was to start back North today," remarked the other girl. "Jim Valier was going to motor over and meet me at the station when my train came in."

"Poor Jim!" sighed Linda, little thinking that the young man had no intention of doing that. "He'll have a good wait. But Jim can always sleep, on any occasion."

"I guess he won't expect me. . . . We must be reported as missing by now—in all the newspapers."

"Of course. I'd forgotten. . . ."

The girls wrapped themselves in blankets and slept the rest of the afternoon, to waken in time to see the sun, which had appeared at last, just setting over the sea. Their clothing was still damp and disheveled, but they put it on and went up on deck to hunt their benefactor.

"We want you to let us cook," announced Dot, as she spied him. "We insist on making ourselves useful."

The man smiled pleasantly.

"All right," he agreed. "You can—tomorrow. But supper's ready now. Come on down."

They followed the Captain into the kitchen, where another man was placing a dish of potatoes on the wooden table, which did not boast of a cover.

"Meet Steve, ladies," he said—"my friend the pilot."

The girls nodded, and Dot asked, with anxiety, "But who's guiding the boat now, while Mr. Steve eats his supper?"

Both men laughed at her concern.

"There's another one besides us. He takes his turn, and so do I. We never all three eat or sleep at the same time."

It was a merry meal, though an exceedingly greasy one of fried potatoes and underdone bacon. The coffee, too, was none too good—for it was weak and muddy-looking. Nevertheless, both girls praised the supper extravagantly, for it tasted good to them, but they inwardly resolved to show the men the next day how food ought to be cooked.

The next two days passed pleasantly enough, for the girls were able to busy themselves with the meals, and the men's appreciation was plenty of reward for their efforts. In their off hours they relaxed by watching the ocean and scanning the sky for air-planes, the make of which Linda could often guess. Sometimes they played checkers with each other, or with Captain Smallweed, to the latter's delight. But never again was the suspicious-looking tool-box mentioned, until Linda herself handed it over to Steve, saying that she did not want to bother to take it to Havana.

By the time July third arrived, their boat was well out of the range of the yacht that was

cruising in search of them, and on July fourth —the day that Jim Valier spotted the overturned motor-boat early in the morning—Captain Smallweed docked safely at Cuba.

"Where do you girls want to go now?" asked the Captain, as the party stepped ashore. "Want to come along home with me, and meet the wife? She can rig you up in some decent clothes."

"Thank you very much," replied Linda, "but we want to get to a telephone as soon as possible, so that we can get in touch with our families. So if you would just get us a taxi, and send us to the best hotel in Havana——"

"In those rigs?" inquired the other, in amazement. "Everybody will stare at you! They dress well in Cuba, you know."

"Oh, we're past caring about appearances," laughed Linda. "So stop that taxi for us, will you please, Captain? . . . And thank you a thousand times for all you have done for us."

"You'll hear from our fathers soon," added Dot, as she too shook hands with the old man.

Cautiously protecting the bag, into which Linda had stuffed the revolvers under the money, the girls taxied to the best hotel in the

city. The driver eyed them suspiciously, and the clerk at the desk stared at them as if they were hoboes. But he condescended to assign them a room when they showed evidence of paying in advance.

"We want a long-distance wire first of all," announced Linda. "We'd like to telephone from our rooms——"

She stopped abruptly, for two slender arms were suddenly thrust about her neck, and kisses were being pressed violently upon her lips and cheeks. Louise Mackay stood behind them! Louise, with her husband, both in flyers' suits.

Try as she could, the girl could not utter a word. The tears ran down her cheeks, and she continued to kiss first Linda and then Dot in the wildest ecstasy.

"I can't believe it!" she said at last. "Is it really, truly you, Linda darling?"

"What's left of us," replied Linda, laughing. "Did you ever see two such sights as we are?"

"I never saw anyone or anything in my life that looked half so good to me!" returned Louise, fervently. She stepped back and laid her hand on her husband's arm, for so far Ted

had not had a chance to say anything, or be included in the welcome. "Tell me it's true, Ted—that I'm not dreaming!" she urged. "I simply can't believe it."

"It's the best, the truest thing in the world," the young man assured her.

"We were positive you were dead," Louise explained. "We had so much evidence to prove it—the empty island where you were marooned, the over-turned motor-boat that Jim Valier spotted early this morning——"

"Jim Valier!" repeated Dot, in amazement. "Where would Jim see our old boat?"

"Jim and Ralph and your two fathers are on a yacht, searching for you. They broadcast by radio any news they get. And Ted and I have flown to every island anywhere near the coast. We finished searching them all, so we landed here this morning, just for a rest."

"Then you have a plane!" cried Linda, in delight. "You can take us back to Florida! I'd so hate to get into another boat—I simply loathe the sight of them."

"Do tell us what happened to you," urged Ted. "I don't understand how we missed you everywhere."

"It's a pretty long story," replied Dot. "I think we better phone our families first. They must be almost crazy."

"They are," agreed Ted. "You go up in your room and phone them while I go to a radio station and broadcast the news."

"And I'll tell you what I'll do in the meanwhile," offered Louise. "I'll go out and buy you some decent clothing!"

Chapter XIX

The Return

Until the second of July, Linda's aunt, Miss Emily Carlton, had managed, with Mrs. Crowley's help, to keep hoping that the girls were still alive. Then her brother's long-distance call from Jacksonville, informing her that he was going to sea in a yacht in search of Linda and Dot confirmed all the fears she was secretly cherishing. That night she collapsed and went to bed a nervous wreck.

After once mentioning the fact that Linda was still reported missing in the newspapers, Miss Carlton's housekeeper learned not to speak of the girl again. It seemed as if the older woman could not bear to talk about her niece; in the few days since her disappearance she had aged rapidly. She lay listlessly on her bed, not seeing anyone, not even her dear friend Mrs. Crowley.

It was about noon on the fourth of July that

the telephone operator informed the housekeeper that Havana was calling Miss Carlton. The good woman replied that her mistress was sick in bed, and that she would take the message for her. Her hands trembled as she awaited what she believed would be the announcement of Linda's death.

Faint and far off came the astounding words: "Aunt Emily, this is Linda."

"Wait!" cried the woman, shaking as if she had heard a ghost. "I'll get your aunt, Miss Linda."

Rushing to the bed-room, she handed Miss Carlton the bed-side telephone.

"It's Miss Linda," she whispered.

Doubting her senses, the patient sat up and took the instrument.

"Hello," she said, doubtfully.

"Darling Aunt Emily! It's Linda!" was the almost unbelievable reply at the other end of the wire.

Miss Carlton sobbed; she could not say a word.

"Aunt Emily? Are you there?" demanded the girl.

"Yes, yes—dear! Oh, are you all right? Not hurt?"

"Not a bit. Dot and I are both fine—she's talking to her mother now. We're—in Cuba."

"Cuba!" repeated the startled woman. "I thought it was the Okefenokee Swamp, or the Atlantic Ocean! Your father and Mr. Crowley are looking for you."

"Yes, I know. Ted and Louise are here, and Ted's broadcasting the news of our safe arrival now. . . . Probably Daddy has heard by this time."

"When will you be home, dear?" inquired Miss Carlton.

"Soon, I hope. . . . But we have to stop in Jacksonville first. . . . Aunt Emily, couldn't you and Mrs. Crowley come to Jacksonville? We're just dying to see you!"

Miss Carlton considered; she hated to tell Linda that she was sick in bed. But wait—was she? Wasn't it only nerves after all? Why, this good news made her feel like a different person!

"All right, dear," she agreed. "If Mrs. Crowley will, I'll try to arrange it. Shall I send a wire?"

"Yes," replied Linda. "To Captain Magee, at the City Hall, Jacksonville. I'll be there in a day or so. . . . Now good-by, dear Auntie!"

While Linda waited for Dot to come back from her call, which the latter had put in from another instrument, she opened the bag and took out their few possessions that were covering the money. They must be very careful not to let anything happen to all that wealth, she thought—they must never go out of the room and leave it, if only for a minute. How dreadful it would be if it were stolen now, after they had successfully brought it through all their dangerous adventures!

Dot returned in a couple of minutes, and the girls got ready to enjoy the luxury of a real bath, in a real tub. How good the warm water felt, how wonderful the big, soft bath towels! They spent an hour bathing and washing their hair, and trying to make their nails presentable with Louise's manicure set.

They had scarcely finished when the latter returned, followed by a porter carrying innumerable boxes and packages in his arms.

"I've bought everything for you from the skin out," she announced gayly, as she put the

load on the floor. "Even hats and shoes, though I knew I was taking a chance at them. But I remembered that you and I often wore each other's things at school, Linda, and I judged that Dot would wear a size smaller. I do hope you can wear them, just till you get to your trunks at Jacksonville."

"You're an angel, Lou!" cried Linda, excited at the prospect of looking clean and respectable again.

"See if you like them," urged Louise. "I got a blue dress for you Linda, to match your eyes—and a pink one for Dot."

"To match my eyes?" teased the latter.

All three girls began immediately to untie the packages, and drew out the purchases one after another with exclamations of admiration. Dot said that she was so used to seeing dirty knickers that she had positively forgotten what dainty clothing looked like.

"Well, hurry up and dress!" urged Louise. "We want to eat lunch in about ten minutes. Ted means to take off at two o'clock, if you girls think you can be ready by then."

"We surely can!" cried Linda, joyfully. She couldn't wait to get back.

"You'll burn your old stuff, won't you?" asked Louise. "This bag's a sight, too—why not stuff your old clothing into it, and ask the porter to take it away?"

Linda and Dot let out a wild cry of protest at the same moment, and the other girl frowned.

"Why not?" she inquired.

"Sh!" whispered Linda. "That bag has thousands of dollars in it. Belonging to the Jacksonville bank."

"Oh! You really have that money? And kept it all this time?"

"Yes. But don't say a word about it out loud. We'll take it with us into the dining-room, and wear our new hats, so nobody will think it queer."

They found Ted in the lobby of the hotel as they got out of the elevator, and they went into the dining-room to order the meal that Linda and Dot had been longing for on the island. It tasted good to them, but not so good, they had to admit, as the sausages and stale bread and hot tea which Captain Smallweed provided, when they were almost starved.

It was during the meal that they pieced the

story together. Linda began by telling of the finding of the money in the bags and the discovery of the last member of the gang on the island.

"But why he ran away without shooting us is a mystery to us," put in Dot.

"He thought that you had armed policemen with you," explained Louise. "We learned that later from Susie. She was captured a couple of days ago—in Panama."

"Where is she now?" demanded Linda, excitedly.

"In jail, of course."

"And the man they called the 'Doc'?"

"No," replied Ted. "Unfortunately he got away—fled the country. Lucky you girls got hold of the money, or the bank would never have seen it again. . . . And by the way, there's a big reward—ten thousand dollars, I believe."

"Ten thousand dollars!" repeated Dot, in amazement. "What do you think of that, Linda?"

"Wonderful!" cried the latter, joyously. "Five thousand apiece. Well, I'm glad you're going to get something out of this dreadful experience, Dot—that I selfishly dragged you into.

And my part will go towards a new autogiro."

"A new autogiro!" exclaimed Louise, in surprise. "You don't need one, Linda. The Ladybug's safe and sound—at the Jacksonville airport."

"What? You mean that?" Linda seized the other girl's hand in almost incredulous rapture. "How did it get there?"

"The police found it that day it stormed so. And a pilot flew it back to Jacksonville."

Linda and Dot gazed at each other in full realization at last of the mysterious disappearance of the plane which they had mourned as lost forever.

If Linda was eager to get back to Jacksonville before, she was doubly so now. She could hardly contain her excitement during that flight across the Gulf of Mexico and over the state of Florida to the northern part. She kept urging Ted to put on more speed, to let the motor out to its limit, but the young man, realizing the load he was carrying, was not to be tempted beyond his better judgment.

They arrived at Jacksonville just as it was growing dusk, and flew over the city, now so

familiar to them all, to the airport on its outskirts. Gracefully the skillful pilot swooped down the field to his landing.

The usual number of employees came out to greet them, but hardly had the girls climbed out of the plane when a resounding shout went up over the field. Linda Carlton and Dorothy Crowley had been recognized!

A crowd collected immediately, a crowd that had been prepared by Ted's radio message that afternoon, to welcome the two popular girls back to civilization. It was all that Linda and Dot could do to wave and shout greetings in return.

"I just want one look at my Ladybug," said Linda. "If you good people will let me get through——"

At this request, an accommodating official picked her right up on his shoulder, and carried her, amid the laughter of the crowd, triumphantly to the hangar where the autogiro was housed.

"Oh, you dear Ladybug!" whispered Linda, not wanting anyone to think she was silly, but so overcome with joy that she had to say some-

thing. No one but a pilot could understand the genuine affection which she felt for her autogiro.

"I'll be over to fly you tomorrow," she added, under her breath. Then, turning to the man who had conducted her across the field, she asked him whether he could as easily take her to the waiting taxi-cab.

They were off at last, waving and smiling to the enthusiastic crowd.

"Be sure to stay in Jacksonville till Saturday," the people begged them. "We're going to celebrate for you then!"

The girls nodded, and the taxi driver sped away with orders to go straight to the City Hall.

Captain Magee, who had received a call from the airport, was ready and waiting for them. Ted carried the shabby, worn bag into his office, and Linda put it into the Captain's hands herself.

"The bank's money," she explained. "And the two revolvers. We never had to use them at all."

"But we'd have died without them," added Dot. "Of fright—if nothing else."

In vain Captain Magee tried to tell the girls

how wonderfully brave he thought they had been, but he was so overcome by feeling that he groped for words and stammered—ending by pressing both Linda's and Dot's hands in silence.

"Two young girls like you—" he finally managed to say—"succeeding where the police and everybody else failed! Capturing a hundred thousand dollars by a clever trick——"

"Is there really that much?" inquired Dot. "Of course we never counted it."

The officer smiled at their unconcern. In spite of all their ability, they still seemed like children to him.

"By the way, Miss Carlton," he said, "I had a wire from your aunt this afternoon. She will arrive in Jacksonville Saturday morning—accompanied by Mrs. Crowley."

This final piece of good news was just what the girls needed to complete their perfect day. Their eyes lighted up with happiness, and they squeezed each other's hands in joy.

"And your fathers ought to be back tomorrow. I'll send them straight to the hotel," he added. "So don't go away."

"Wild horses couldn't drag us!" returned

Linda. "We're just dying to see them. . . . Now, good-by, Captain Magee. . . . We must go and get some dinner."

So, back in the hotel in Jacksonville, Dot Crowley and Linda Carlton spent their first enjoyable evening for a week—celebrating their safe return with their dear friends, the Mackays.

Chapter XX

Conclusion

The girls' first visitor the following day was not, as they had hoped, the party from the yacht, but a woman.

"Who can it be?" demanded Dot, for the clerk at the desk had not sent up a name with the message.

"A reporter, probably," yawned Linda. "They'll be hot on our trail now, Dot. That was one good thing about the island—we didn't have to read newspapers or give interviews."

"You're not wishing you were back again?"

"Never!" affirmed Linda, surveying the breakfast tray which she and Dot had been luxuriously enjoying. "I don't care for cold tea and crackers as a steady diet."

"But what shall we do about this visitor?" persisted her companion. "The clerk's still waiting for our reply."

"Oh, tell him to send her up, I suppose. After all, the poor girls have to earn a living."

As Dot gave the message over the telephone, Linda surveyed the room with a frown of distaste.

"It's not so neat, Dot—to receive a caller," she remarked. "Maybe we ought to have gone downstairs."

"Think I better try to call him back?"

"No, I guess it's too late now—the girl's probably on the elevator by this time. Anyhow, it really doesn't matter. Newspaper women are usually awfully good sports."

To their amazement and chagrin, it was not a reporter to whom, a moment later, Dot opened the door. A beautifully dressed woman stood before them, smiling nervously. It was Mrs. Carter—Jackson Carter's mother!

"How do you do, Mrs. Carter!" exclaimed Dot. "Do come in—if you can pardon the appearance of this room."

The older woman seemed scarcely to notice the unmade beds or the open trunks. She nodded to Linda as she entered, but she appeared like a person with something serious on her mind.

"How did you know where to find us?" inquired Dot, after she had cleared a chair for their visitor.

"It's in all the papers," the latter replied. "Haven't you read about yourselves? Why, everybody in town thinks you two girls are simply marvelous! Rescuing that money was a miracle in itself—an act of courage that Jacksonville will always be grateful to you for."

"It's awfully nice of you to say so," murmured Dot, for Linda remained silent. Somehow the latter could never feel at home with this woman.

"Our city is planning a parade and celebration in your honor," she continued. "And the Daughters of the Confederacy would like to invite you to a dinner and reception afterwards. That is one of the reasons why I came to see you—to extend the invitation in person."

"It's extremely kind of you," assented Dot. "We'll be delighted to accept, won't we, Linda?"

"Why, yes—of course—only—" Linda paused, hoping that she was not appearing rude.

"Except what, my dear?" asked Mrs. Carter.

"Well, it's marvelous of you to do it for us,

but you see our fathers are coming—and Dot's mother—and my Aunt Emily——"

"But they are included, of course! There will be both men and women at the banquet, and my brother-in-law, the president of the bank that was robbed, hopes to present you girls with the reward."

"Oh, it's going to be great fun, Linda!" exclaimed Dot, excitedly. "We've just got to be there!"

"Yes, it will be charming," agreed the other girl. "We'll be delighted to come—if we may bring our friends."

There seemed nothing more to say, yet Mrs. Carter made no move towards going. To fill an awkward pause, Dot inquired how Jackson was.

"Jackson has been away since the first of July," replied the older woman. "I haven't heard anything from him, and I am quite anxious, though he warned me he couldn't write. He and his chum, Hal Perry, went into the Okefenokee Swamp to search for you girls."

"The Okefenokee Swamp!" repeated Linda. It seemed ages since she had been lost in that desolate expanse.

"Yes. And I wondered, Miss Carlton, whether you would be willing to fly up to the northern end, up towards Camp Cordelia, and look for them. Oh, I don't mean go into the swamp again —that would be too dreadful—but just fly around it."

"Yes, of course," agreed Linda, not knowing what else to say. "If you will let me wait until my Daddy comes, so I can take him with me."

"Naturally!"

Mrs. Carter rose at last, but she still appeared to be embarrassed.

"There is something else I want to say to you, Miss Carlton. An apology, this time. I know now that you are the same girl my son rescued in the swamp and brought home to our house. The girl to whom I was so rude. . . . I —I want to beg your pardon."

It was a great deal from a woman of Mrs. Carter's dignity and importance, and Linda was deeply touched.

"This is very sweet of you, Mrs. Carter," she said. "And of course I understand how you felt at the time. I'm only too glad to forget all about it. . . . And," she added, holding out her

hand, "I'll go to your son's rescue, as he has twice gone to mine—as soon as my Daddy comes."

Still the visitor hesitated, even after she had shaken hands with both the girls, and had reached the doorway.

"Would you girls consider bringing your families out to our home, to spend the week-end with us?" she asked, more as one seeking than as one bestowing a favor.

Dot did not answer this time; she looked inquiringly at Linda.

"It would be lovely," replied the latter, with genuine enthusiasm. "But I am afraid there are too many of us. You see there are two friends with us now—Mr. and Mrs. Mackay, who picked us up in Havana—and there are two more with our fathers on the yacht. With my aunt and Dot's mother, it will make ten in all. And that is too big a crowd for any place but a hotel!"

"Not at all!" protested Mrs. Carter. "I should love it. We have plenty of room, and plenty of servants—and we enjoy house-parties. How I shall look forward to seeing your mother, Dorothy! . . . You will come, won't you, girls —as soon as the whole party is together?"

With such a pressing invitation as this, they could not do otherwise than graciously accept, and, satisfied at last, Mrs. Carter bade them good-by.

There was no opportunity to discuss this unexpected visit, for no sooner had this caller departed than others began to arrive. Louise dashed into the room on her return from breakfasting with Ted in the dining-room, and before Dot and Linda could repeat the invitation to her, news came that the yachting party had arrived.

The reunion of the two girls with their fathers was touching to see. For some minutes they clung to one another in the lobby of the hotel, regardless of the strangers about. Ralph Clavering and Jim Valier stood in the background, unnoticed.

But at last Linda and Dot freed themselves from their fathers' arms and gave their attention to the young men, thanking them as best they could for all the difficulties they had encountered for their sakes. Ted and Louise joined the group in a little while, and it was a happy party of eight that went into luncheon

that day, all laughing and asking questions and explaining at once.

About three o'clock that afternoon Linda suddenly remembered her promise to Mrs. Carter in regard to flying over the Okefenokee Swamp in search of Jackson, and she suggested to her father that they go to the airport immediately.

Mr. Carlton shook his head decidedly.

"No, daughter," he said. "You will never have my consent again to fly within fifty miles of that dismal swamp!"

"But we must be within fifty miles of it now," returned Linda. "Shall we leave Jacksonville?"

"Now, Linda! You know what I mean."

"But how shall I tell Mrs. Carter? I promised, you know."

"You can leave that to me," he replied. "I'll explain."

But it was not necessary to do this, for the woman telephoned herself almost immediately to say that the boys had arrived by automobile half an hour ago. She concluded by reminding Linda that she was expecting the whole party the following day for luncheon.

Saturday dawned clear and bright, and the parade was scheduled for the early morning,

before the sun's rays became blistering. Linda and Dot occupied seats of honor on the canopied grandstand, beside the Mayor, and they bowed and smiled to everyone that passed by.

Miss Carlton and Mrs. Crowley arrived just in time to witness the demonstration, in honor of their two brave girls. When they all returned to the hotel, they found three cars waiting to drive them to the Carter estate. Jackson Carter was at the wheel of the smallest—his own roadster—and he insisted that Linda ride with him, an invitation which she accepted much to Ralph Clavering's displeasure.

The lovely Colonial estate, with its spacious lawns and beautiful tennis-courts, its big, old shade trees secluding a charming out-door swimming-pool, promised a delightful change from the hot city. In the tradition of the South, Mrs. Carter proved herself an ideal hostess—a fact which Linda noticed with secret amusement, as she recalled the absence of any welcome on her previous visit. But evidently if Mrs. Carter took a liking to someone, there was nothing too much trouble for her to do.

While the three older women chatted on the veranda that afternoon, the young people, in-

cluding Hal Perry who had joined the party, played tennis and swam in the pool. Mr. Carlton and Mr. Crowley, as young as any of them in spirit, joined in the fun.

It was all so beautiful, so peaceful, that Linda just wanted to sit still, drinking in the luxury of it, after her strenuous days since she had flown away from Spring City in the Ladybug on the twentieth of June. While Dot and Hal Perry rivaled each other in fancy diving stunts, Linda found a place under a big tree and watched them dreamily. It was some time before she knew that she was not alone; then turning about, she saw Ralph Clavering on one side and Jackson Carter on the other.

But it was her father who came up and claimed her attention.

"A penny for your thoughts, Daughter!" he said. "I know you're planning some long flight, whenever you're lost like that in dreams. Out with it! Where are you going next?"

"You'd be surprised if you knew, Daddy," she replied, with a smile.

"I've learned never to be surprised any more," he assured her.

"Well, you will be this time. . . . I'm going back to Green Falls with Aunt Emily, to spend the rest of the summer in peace!"

Mr. Carlton stared at his daughter in amazement; she was right—nothing could have surprised him more than this announcement of hers. Ralph Clavering, too, was astounded and delighted, for it was good news to him.

"How about your job?" inquired her father.

"I've lost it by this time—and anyway, I don't want a job until fall . . . I'm—rather tired of excitement. And I want the public to forget all about me. By September, a lot of other girls will have done more wonderful things in flying, and I can go about my work in peace."

"Nothing could suit me better," remarked Ralph, complacently. "It looks to me as if Linda has gotten some sense at last, Mr. Carlton."

"Only temporary sense," laughed the girl. "It won't last long, Ralph."

"It doesn't suit *me* so well," put in Jackson Carter. "I don't see why Clavering and Valier should get all the breaks. . . . Linda, why don't

you spend one month with us here in the South, and go to Green Falls in August? My mother would be delighted."

"It's awfully nice of you to suggest that, Jack," replied Linda, pleased with the tribute to herself and Dot, "but I think that the visiting has been too much on our side already. Why don't you come north and visit us—bringing Hal and your mother?"

"Yes, do," urged Mr. Carlton, though this idea was not at all agreeable to Ralph. As if there weren't enough fellows already to share Linda with at Green Falls!

"I'd love to, if you all mean it," returned Jackson. "At least if Hal agrees."

The dinner at the big Hall that evening was a gorgeous affair; everyone of prominence in Jacksonville was present to pay tribute to the two girls who by this time they almost considered their own. The Mayor of the city made a speech, and Jackson's uncle—Mr. Randolph Carter, the bank president—presented each of the girls with a gold medal and five thousand dollars reward.

Nodding and smiling to everyone in the room, Linda and Dot stepped forward, looking like

two pictures of beautiful American girlhood. With their modesty and charm they had won the hearts of everybody in Jacksonville.

It was after their return to their seats, when the applause had died down, that Linda leaned over and whispered to Dot.

"My only regret," she said, "is that the Ladybug couldn't be here to share the honors. For if it hadn't been for her, all this would never have happened!"

LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

LAVELL

A. L. BURT COMPANY